

WORST WORDS

Media release

15 December 2021

“Centres for National Resilience” named Worst Words of 2021

Plain English Foundation has voted **Centres for National Resilience** as the worst word or phrase of 2021.

When Australian authorities announced new quarantine centres, they dubbed them “Centres for National Resilience”.

“Australians like to pride ourselves on calling a spade a spade,” said the Foundation’s Executive Director, Dr Neil James. “But when it comes to quarantine, it seems the plain word wasn’t fancy enough.”

Each year, Plain English Foundation gathers dozens of examples of the worst words to highlight the importance of clear public language.

Not surprisingly, COVID-19 featured prominently on the list.

When discussing targets for the vaccine rollout, authorities dubbed these **national vaccination allocation horizons**. And a state Premier insisted that she would **absolutely potentially** consider vaccine incentives.

“When facing our worst public health crisis in a century, plain language is critical so the public understand what is happening and what they need to do,” Dr James said. “Yet too often the language was unclear”.

2021 was another bad year for euphemism, doublespeak and spin. Amazon instructed its workers to become **industrial athletes**. Academics suggested we start saying **negative encounter** instead of “shark attack”, and police reported on an encounter with an **edged weapon** (a knife).

“It’s one thing to overdress the language to make something sound fancier than it is,” Dr James said. “But when it starts to deliberately mislead, there is a serious ethical concern.”

The Foundation’s list also highlighted some of the latest jargon and Frankenwords, ranging from **Metaverse** and **non-fungible token** to **gooder** and **bestertest**.

“Corporations will always push the language to make something sound more exciting or try to get our attention,” Dr James said. “But sometimes it just gets too fancy to understand, and in other cases commits clear crimes against the English language.”

Our teenagers contributed **cheugy** and **bussin** to the list, which then rounds out with the mixed metaphor and non-apology of the year.

Dr Neil James, Executive Director, Plain English Foundation is **available for interview** over the Christmas and holiday period.

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Complete shortlist

15 December 2021

Worst Words and Phrases of 2021

Winner

Centres for National Resilience

When is a quarantine centre not a quarantine centre? When it is a “centre for national resilience”. Federal authorities were proud to announce the first centre for national resilience would open in 2021.

We should be thankful that hotel quarantine wasn’t rebranded as “temporary in-bound accommodation for national resilience”.

Covidspeak

National vaccination allocation horizons

In an attempt to inoculate the population about the vaccine “strollout”, the Prime Minister and the federal health agency described the target for each stage as an “allocation horizon”.

Because it doesn’t sound so bad if you miss an allocation horizon.

Absolutely potentially

Former NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian did a double adverb with pike when Sky News asked whether she would consider incentives for vaccinations.

“Absolutely potentially,” she explained.

Doublespeak and spin

Industrial athletes

Overworked Amazon warehouse workers are encouraged to view themselves as “industrial athletes”. A leaked pamphlet set out that:

“Here at Amazon, you will become an industrial athlete. Just like an athlete who trains for an event, industrial athletes need to prepare their bodies to be able to perform their best at work.”

Negative encounters (aka shark attacks)

Academics have persuaded officials in some parts of Australia to stop referring to “shark attacks” in reports and warnings to tourists. It’s far too scary, they reckon, so we should call them “negative encounters” or “interactions” instead.

As the Washington Post reported: “Survivors don’t necessarily agree”.

Worst Words and Phrases of 2021

Police-involved shooting

In the United States, it seems it is hard to admit that the police at times shoot people. Instead, the people who are shot experience a “trooper-involved shooting” or a “police-involved shooting”.

We call this “deception-involved language”.

Edged weapon

Still in law enforcement, Victoria Police used the term “edged weapon” to avoid saying “knife”. Officers confronted a man “who exited the car with the edged weapon”.

Can you imagine if Mick Dundee had tried it? “That’s not an edged weapon. This is an edged weapon.”



Buzzwords and jargon

Metaverse

Originally a word for a science fiction dystopia, Mark Zuckerberg unapologetically adopted “metaverse” when launching his new “Meta” brand. His “Founder’s Letter, 2021” explains that the “defining quality of the metaverse will be the feeling of presence.” And apparently:

“In this future, you will be able to teleport instantly as a hologram... Think about how many physical things you have today that could just be holograms in the future.”

We think that when COVID ends, we’ll probably want to actually leave the house rather than send our hologram.

Non-fungible token

Non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, are the latest crypto phenomenon to go mainstream. And they’re big business, with Christie’s auction house selling an NFT artwork for a whopping US\$69.3 million this year.

But why not call this something understandable, like a “verifiable source file” or “original digital file”. We guess if you are going to pay nearly \$70 million for a computer file, you’d want it to sound fungible too.



Frankenwords and teen speak

Gooder and Besterest

Another year, another round of corporate advertising committing crimes against the English language. We use grammar, people, and it has some fundamental rules.

Footy is not “gooder” and a razor cannot be “the besterest a man can get”. And we don’t want to have a “Merry Cookiemas”.

Please. Just. Stop.

Worst Words and Phrases of 2021

Cheugy
and
Bussin

Teenagers have always been inventive with language, but every now and then they coin a term that deserves to disappear.

“Cheugy” means that something is out of style or no longer fashionable, as in: “Those uggas are lowkey cheugy”

A more perplexing example is the use of “bussin” for something good – but only apparently applied to food: “this burger is bussin”.



Mixed metaphor of the year

Feeling a pin drop in my stomach

Lady Gaga embraced method acting as the Gucci heiress who murdered Maurizio Gucci. When she later drove past the scene of the crime, she felt as though she’d really killed someone.

In the stomach. With pins.

“I drove by where Maurizio was shot and I felt a pin drop in my stomach because I was so in my character, and I thought: ‘What have I done?’”



Non-apology of the year

Failing to deliver information in a precise way

A beauty company touting its green credentials launched a new product labelled in large all caps with “HELLO I’M PAPER BOTTLE”. it was a standard plastic bottle wrapped in paper.

When challenged, the company said: “We used the term ‘paper bottle’ to explain the role of the paper label surrounding the bottle,” The Korea Times reported.

“We overlooked the possibility that the naming could mislead people to think the whole packaging is made of paper. We apologize for failing to deliver information in a precise way,” the statement added.

We used to call this not telling the truth.