Plain English Campaign’s guide to words about words
We put together our latest mini-guide ‘Words about words’ after collecting numerous queries over the years regarding specific troubling terms. It’s in part a ‘one-stop’ resource that covers all the terms we’ve been asked about (plus a few suitable additions), as well as being a hopefully fun and informative resource.

**Accismus**

Someone pretending they don’t want something they really do. For example, numerous book covers that loudly proclaim: “Do not read this book!”

**Acrostic**

A poem or series of lines in which certain letters, usually the first in each line, form a name, motto, or message when read in sequence.

**Adynaton**

A declaration of impossibility for effect, usually an exaggerated comparison with a more obvious impossibility. “I will sooner have a beard grow in the palm of my hand than he shall get one of his cheek.” – William Shakespeare.

**Alliteration**

Words using the same letter for musical, mnemonic or immersive effect. In this example ‘sibilance’ (the repetitive use of the letter ‘s’) is also employed: “She sells seashells by the seashore.”

**Allusion**

An indirect reference to a place, event, or text by way of easily understood emphasis. “Watch out for the estate agents’ noses growing as they describe the property” a direct allusion to Pinocchio.

**Amphigory**

Nonsense writing, usually in verse. “Twas brillig, and the slithy toves Did gyre and gimble in the wabe; All mimsy were the borogoves, And the mome raths outgrabe.” – Lewis Carroll, ‘Jabberwocky’.
**Analogy**

The illustration of an idea by using a more familiar comparison. “The Conservative cabinet reshuffle was akin to the band on the Titanic switching instruments.”

**Anatonym**

A part of the body used as a verb (toe the line; face the music; foot the bill).

**Anthropomorphism**

The attribution of human behaviour to non-human things. For example, cartoons that include animal characters using human speech and mimicking human behaviour, often to encourage emotional connection, such as ‘The Jungle Book’ and ‘The Lion King’.

**Antonym**

A word of opposite meaning. ‘Love’ as the antonym of ‘hate’.

**Antagonym**

A single word containing meanings that contradict each other, such as ‘cleave’ which can mean both ‘cut apart’ and ‘hold together’.

**Apocryphal**

A fabricated but engaging story meant to impart a serious, often moral, point via suggested authenticity. For example, a made-up disaster featuring an imaginary driver meant to dissuade people against drink-driving. “Bob had five pints and then left me in the pub, only later to crash his Ford Focus into a chip-shop. You shouldn’t drink and drive!”

**Aporia**

An often insincere or rhetorical expression of doubt, about what a speaker should say, think, or do. "Oh no! Whatever shall I do now?"

**Autoantonym**

A word that can mean the opposite of itself. (See also: Contronym.)
**Babblative**
Given to babbling; prattling, prating, loquacious.

**Blatteroon**
A constant talker.

**Bromide**
Hackneyed phrases (such as “I don’t know much about art, but I know what I like”) uttered by boring and predictable people. Coined by the American illustrator and humorist Gelett Burgess after the then-familiar sedative, potassium bromide.

**Camouflanguage**
Language using jargon, euphemisms, and other devices to hide the true meaning of what is being said, as often heard from witless and vaguely sinister corporate stooges.

**Capitonym**
A word which changes its meaning and pronunciation when capitalized, examples include polish and Polish, august and August, concord and Concord.

**Contronym**
A word which is its own opposite. ‘Cleave,’ meaning ‘adhere’ and ‘separate.’ See also: autoantonym.

**Cryptonym**
A private or secret name (Agent 007).

**Dentiloquy**
Speaking through clenched teeth.

**Domunym**
Literally ‘home name,’ used to identify people from particular places (Philadelphians; Annapolitans).

**Exonym**
A place name used by foreigners that differs from the name used by natives. For example, Londres is the French exonym for London; Germany is an exonym because Germans call it Deutschland.

**Embolalia**

The use of virtually meaningless filler words, phrases, or stammered speech items, either unconscious or while arranging thoughts, or as vacuous, inexpressive mannerisms. Remember Hugh Grant in Four Weddings and a Funeral?

**Etymology** (occasionally confused with Entomology, the study of insects)

The study of word origins and changing word meanings.

**Euphemism**

The substitution of a harsh, offensive, or unpleasant word with a nicer alternative.

**Garrulous**

Extremely talkative.

**Glyph**

A symbol, such as on a public sign, that imparts information without words, especially a figure or character incised or in relief.

**Hyperbole**

Exaggeration for emphasis or rhetorical or dramatic effect. “There are a billion reasons why Donald Trump is a terrible President.”

**Hypercorrect**

An incorrect linguistic construction in which the error comes from a mistaken effort to be correct, such as with ‘Between you and I,’ which should be ‘between you and me.’ See also: hyponym.

**Hyponym**
A word more specific than a related generic term. For example: *spoon* is a hyponym of *cutlery*. See also: hypercorrect.

**Idiolect**

The speech of an individual, considered as a linguistic pattern unique among speakers of his or her language or dialect.

**Interjection**

A phrase consisting of words such as oh!, alas!, and ouch!, often marked by emphasis usually shown with an exclamation point.

**Kenning**

Replacement of a common noun by a more exciting compound, for example ‘Information superhighway’ rather than ‘Internet.’

**Kerning**

The adjusted space between letters in a font.

**Logophile**

Word-lover.

**Logorrhea**

Excessive use of words.

**Metaphor**

Unlike simile, which suggests something is directly comparable to something similar using ‘as’ or ‘like’, metaphor compares two things by suggesting that one thing is something else altogether. ‘Love is a battlefield.’ Simile would have it: ‘Love is like a battlefield.’

**Metonym**

A word standing in for something connected to it, such as ‘the Crown’ when referring to the monarchy, ‘the bottle’ when referring to alcohol, ‘wheels’ when referring to a car.

**Misandry**
The flipside version of misogyny (hatred of women), but misandry (hatred of men) far less evident, it seems…

**Mondegreen**

A series of words, often humorous, that result from mishearing a statement or song lyric. For example: ‘Every time you go away, you take a piece of meat with you,’ misheard from Paul Young’s ‘Every Time You Go Away’.

**Neologism**

New word or term.

**Nymrod**

A person who insists on turning every multi-word term into an acronym.

**Onomatopoeia**

A word referring to a specific sound, whose pronunciation mimics that sound.

**Oxymoron**

An apparently contradictory term or statement that nonetheless often makes emphatic sense. “You’ve got to be cruel to be kind.”

**Palindrome**

A word or phrase spelled the same forward and backward. “Dammit! I’m mad!”

**Paradiastole**

A figure of speech in which a vice is portrayed as a virtue. “I spent a lot of money on booze, birds and fast cars. The rest I just squandered.” George Best.

**Parechesis**

The repetition of the same sound in words in close or immediate succession. “Veni, vidi, vici.” -- Julius Caesar. See also: alliteration, assonance, consonance.

**Paradox**
A contradictory statement that nonetheless may state a truth. “The child is the father of the man” – Wordsworth.

**Pleonasm**

The use of a superfluity of words, often deliberately, for emphasis. "I've never seen anything more obscene in all my 80 years on this Earth."

**Pseudoantonym**

A word that appears to mean the opposite of what it actually means (unloosen; inflammable; ingenious; despoil; impassive).

**Pubilect**

A dialect unique to teenagers (puberty + dialect). Coined by Marcel Danesi, a professor of linguistics and semiotics at the University of Toronto.

**Reduplicative**

A word or phrase formed by the doubling of a syllable or other part of a word, sometimes with modifications. For example, ‘so-so,’ ‘helter-skelter,’ or ‘beriberi.’

**Ricochet word**

A word or phrase formed by the doubling of a syllable or other part of a word, which involves modification of the initial or middle or final part of the root. For example, mish-mash, higgledy-piggledy (possibly a reduplication of ‘pig’), ‘hanky-panky,’ ‘honky tonk,’ ‘criss-cross.’ See reduplicative.

**Rhinestone vocabulary**

Words or phrases chosen only because they appeal to a particular person or group. For example, political speakers using the likes of ‘family values’, ‘equal rights’, and ‘lower taxes’ for easy impact.

**Simile**

A figure of speech in which two things are compared, usually with ‘as’ or ‘like’. "He was like a tornado." Unlike metaphor, where something is described as being something else altogether, without the use of ‘as’ or ‘like’ (”He was a tornado.”)

**Slanguist**
A linguist specialising in slang words and phrases.

**Slurvian**

English characterized by slurred pronunciation. Examples include ‘gimme’ instead of ‘give me,’ ‘d’jo’ instead of ‘did you,’ and ‘Frisco’ instead of ‘San Francisco.’

**Stump-word**

A word formed by shortening another word, such as ‘math’, ‘gym’ or ‘ad’.

**Synonym**

One of two (or more) words that have the same (or very similar) meaning: big and large; error and mistake; run and sprint.

**Technopropism**

The unintentionally funny misuse of a technical word or phrase (for example "We’ll release the product once it passes the fault infection test.").

**Tmesis**

Placing a word in the middle of another. ‘Fan-bloody-tastic’ and ‘un-flipping-believable.’

**Verbicide**

The destruction of the sense or value of a word.

**Weblish**

A form of online English, the characteristics of which include the use of all-lowercase letters, less punctuation, spelling and grammatical errors, and an informal tone. Also, netspeak.

**Wordfact**

A much-applied label that eventually becomes accepted as fact. "Not all Brexiteers are ‘xenophobes’ – it is a mere wordfact."