

The Word of the Year 2024 Edition: A Year in Six Words (And Some More) [B2]

Le conseguenze psiconeurologiche della spazzatura che inonda Internet hanno già un nome, scelto da Oxford Languages come parola dell'anno 2024: "brain rot". E non è l'unico termine che ci racconta lo stato d'animo mondiale degli ultimi dodici mesi.

Have you ever experienced **[brain rot](#)**? You almost certainly have, even if you didn't know it by that name. Brain rot can be **[triggered](#)** by something as simple as watching too many cat videos, or memes, or **[mindless](#)** TikTok videos.

BRAIN ROT

Oxford Languages, publishers of the famous Oxford English Dictionary, define **[brain rot](#)** as "the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or **[unchallenging](#)**." And in December 2024 they announced '**[brain rot](#)**' as their Word of the Year (WOTY).

REFLECTING THE YEAR

The tradition of choosing a Word of the Year began in 2004. Since then, every year, expert lexicographers from Oxford Languages select a **[shortlist](#)** of words that have seen a big increase in use during that year and that seem to reflect the **[concerns](#)** of the time. The public then gets to vote for their favourite word. In 2019, for example, the Oxford Languages' Word of the Year was 'climate emergency'. And in 2021, when Covid vaccination was still on everyone's mind, their Word of the Year was '**[vax](#)**'. **[Tracking](#)** how much a word is being used online during the year is one way lexicographers make their choices for the **[shortlist](#)**. This year, data analysis showed a 230 per cent increase in the use of the term '**[brain rot](#)**', especially among young people,

and above all on TikTok. Oxford Languages points out that although the term has seen a sudden increase in popularity, it isn't new. The first recorded use of '**brain rot**' was back in 1854. American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau used it in his book *Walden* to criticise the way his contemporaries seemed to be abandoning complex ideas in favour of simplistic ones. Thoreau wrote: "While England **endeavours** to cure the potato rot, will not any endeavour to cure the brain-rot — which prevails so much more widely and fatally?" It seems that every age thinks cultural standards are in decline.

BRAIN ROT IN ACTION

Semantically, the term '**brain rot**' is quite a flexible one. It can refer to the **alleged** effect of low-quality content on the brain, **e.g.** "I can't watch any more of these vids, I'm getting **brain rot**." But it can also refer to the low-quality content itself: videos can be '**brain rot**' (as a noun or an adjective). There are YouTube channels and TikTok hashtags with names like "Most Brain Rot Video". Although **brain rot** is now being used in mainstream journalism, it was Gen Z and **Gen Alpha** who were the first to identify and name the concept. And they are simultaneously the biggest creators of what they themselves call "**brain rot** content."

THE 2024 SHORTLIST

Before you're tempted to check out #brainrot on TikTok (and believe me, life is too short), let's take a look at the five other words that the experts at Oxford Languages chose for this year's **shortlist**. This word has been used for centuries to mean a collection of traditional facts about a subject. But recently '**lore**' has become a popular concept on online **fandoms**, where fans **show off** their comprehensive knowledge about a particular celebrity. The adjective 'demure' has been used in English since the late 1400s and means being serious and modest. 'Demure' as an adjective to describe an **understated** fashion look went viral in summer 2024 when American TikToker Jules Lebron used it in a post about how to dress for work. When the pricing of a product or service varies to reflect demand, it's said to be dynamic. This is a direct translation of a concept in Swedish, 'dynamiska'

prisbildning'. One obvious example of 'dynamic pricing' is the pricing of flights, which can vary enormously depending on when you want to fly. This **blend word** describes a fiction genre that combines a romantic storyline with elements of fantasy, such as magic and the supernatural. The word was first used in 2008 but became popular in 2024 as TikTokers used it in video posts recommending romantic fantasy books. The website Goodreads has a list of recommended romantasy reads. Similar in some ways to '**brain rot**' content, 'slop' is low-quality AI-generated content published online. It could be text generated by a Large Language Model (LLM), such as ChatGPT, or AI-generated video or images. Again, 'slop' isn't a new word but it has been adapted for the digital age. From the mid-1800s, 'slop', or the adjective '**sloppy**', was used to describe low-quality cultural material, especially very sentimental material. As we've seen, several of the words on the **shortlist** aren't new but they have been given a new energy through social media. The English language is changing from minute to minute and when a new word **catches the public imagination** on social media it can spread **at lightning speed.**

OTHERS WOTY

noun (colloquial) the gradual deterioration of a service or product
brought about by a reduction in the quality of service provided, especially of an online platform, and as a consequence of **profit-seeking**. adjective characterized by **shyness** and modesty; reserved. Affectionately or **coyly** decorous, sober, or sedate. noun division into two **sharply** distinct opposites; especially, a state in which the opinions, beliefs, or interests of a group or society no longer **range along** a continuum but become concentrated at opposing extremes. noun a child, especially one who is **ill-mannered** or **unruly**; used **contemptuously** or **playful**. adjective (colloquial) characterized by a **confident** independent, and hedonistic attitude. verb to use methods such as visualization (= **picturing** something in your mind) and affirmation (= repeating positive phrases) to help you imagine achieving something you want, in the belief that doing so will make it more likely to happen.

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Glossary

- **vax** = vaccino (abbrev. vaccine)
- **endeavours** = tentare, sforzarsi
- **Gen Alpha** = nati dal 2010 al 2025
- **show off** = vantarsi
- **sloppy** = sciatto, trasandato
- **shyness** = timidezza
- **sharply** = nitidamente
- **understated** = discreto
- **brought about** = causare
- **profit-seeking** = alla ricerca del profitto
- **confident** = sicuro di sé
- **unchallenging** = poco stimolante
- **concerns** = preoccupazioni
- **alleged** = supposto
- **fandoms** = gruppi di fan
- **ill-mannered** = maleducato
- **shortlist** = lista ristretta
- **Tracking** = tracciare
- **lore** = tradizione popolare
- **at lightning speed** = alla velocità della luce
- **range along** = muoversi lungo
- **triggered** = provocare
- **mindless** = stupidi
- **blend word** = termine combinato
- **catches the public imagination** = catturare l'immaginazione
- **unruly** = disobbediente, indisciplinato
- **e.g.** = per esempio (exempli gratia)
- **coyly** = con ritrosia, in modo schivo
- **contemptuously** = senza alcun rispetto
- **playful** = scherzoso, giocoso
- **brain rot** = putrefazione, decomposizione
- **picturing** = immaginare