

= Truthiness =

Truthiness is a quality characterizing a " truth " that a person making an argument or assertion claims to know intuitively " from the gut " or because it " feels right " without regard to evidence , logic , intellectual examination , or facts .

American television comedian Stephen Colbert coined the word in this meaning as the subject of a segment called " The Wørd " during the pilot episode of his political satire program The Colbert Report on October 17 , 2005 . By using this as part of his routine , Colbert satirized the misuse of appeal to emotion and " gut feeling " as a rhetorical device in contemporaneous socio @-@ political discourse . He particularly applied it to U.S. President George W. Bush 's nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court and the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 . Colbert later ascribed truthiness to other institutions and organizations , including Wikipedia . Colbert has sometimes used a Dog Latin version of the term , " Veritasiness " . For example , in Colbert 's " Operation Iraqi Stephen : Going Commando " the word " Veritasiness " can be seen on the banner above the eagle on the operation 's seal .

Truthiness , although a " stunt word " , was named Word of the Year for 2005 by the American Dialect Society and for 2006 by Merriam @-@ Webster . Linguist and OED consultant Benjamin Zimmer pointed out that the word truthiness already had a history in literature and appears in the Oxford English Dictionary ( OED ) , as a derivation of truthy , and The Century Dictionary , both of which indicate it as rare or dialectal , and to be defined more straightforwardly as " truthfulness , faithfulness " . Responding to claims , Colbert explained the origin of his word as : " Truthiness is a word I pulled right out of my keister " .

= = Use by Stephen Colbert = =

Stephen Colbert , portraying his character Dr. Stephen T. Colbert , chose the word truthiness just moments before taping the premiere episode of The Colbert Report on October 17 , 2005 , after deciding that the originally scripted word ? " truth " ? was not absolutely ridiculous enough . " We 're not talking about truth , we 're talking about something that seems like truth ? the truth we want to exist " , he explained . He introduced his definition in the first segment of the episode , saying : " Now I 'm sure some of the ' word police ' , the ' wordinistas ' over at Webster 's are gonna say , ' Hey , that 's not a word ' . Well , anybody who knows me knows I 'm no fan of dictionaries or reference books . They 're elitist . Constantly telling us what is or isn 't true . Or what did or didn 't happen . "

When asked in an out @-@ of @-@ character interview with The Onion 's A.V. Club for his views on " the ' truthiness ' imbroglio that 's tearing our country apart " , Colbert elaborated on the critique he intended to convey with the word :

Truthiness is tearing apart our country , and I don 't mean the argument over who came up with the word ...

It used to be , everyone was entitled to their own opinion , but not their own facts . But that 's not the case anymore . Facts matter not at all . Perception is everything . It 's certainty . People love the President [ George W. Bush ] because he 's certain of his choices as a leader , even if the facts that back him up don 't seem to exist . It 's the fact that he 's certain that is very appealing to a certain section of the country . I really feel a dichotomy in the American populace . What is important ? What you want to be true , or what is true ? ...

Truthiness is ' What I say is right , and [ nothing ] anyone else says could possibly be true . ' It 's not only that I feel it to be true , but that I feel it to be true . There 's not only an emotional quality , but there 's a selfish quality .

During an interview on December 8 , 2006 , with Charlie Rose , Colbert stated :

I was thinking of the idea of passion and emotion and certainty over information . And what you feel in your gut , as I said in the first Wørd we did , which was sort of a thesis statement of the whole show ? however long it lasts ? is that sentence , that one word , that 's more important to , I think , the public at large , and not just the people who provide it in prime @-@ time cable , than information .

On his April 2 , 2009 episode of the Colbert Report , Colbert added an addendum to the definition : a word so straight that it drives men wild .

= = Coverage by news media = =

After Colbert 's introduction of truthiness , it quickly became widely used and recognized . Six days after , CNN 's Reliable Sources featured a discussion of The Colbert Report by host Howard Kurtz , who played a clip of Colbert 's definition . On the same day , ABC 's Nightline also reported on truthiness , prompting Colbert to respond by saying : " You know what was missing from that piece ? Me . Stephen Colbert . But I 'm not surprised . Nightline 's on opposite me ... "

Within a few months of its introduction by Colbert , truthiness was discussed in The New York Times , The Washington Post , USA Weekly , the San Francisco Chronicle , the Chicago Tribune , Newsweek , CNN , MSNBC , Fox News , the Associated Press , Editor & Publisher , Salon , The Huffington Post , Chicago Reader , CNET , and on ABC 's Nightline , CBS 's 60 Minutes , and The Oprah Winfrey Show .

The February 13 , 2006 , issue of Newsweek featured an article on The Colbert Report titled " The Truthiness Teller " , recounting the career of the word truthiness since its popularization by Colbert .

= = = The New York Times coverage and usage = = =

In its October 25 , 2005 , issue , eight days after the premiere episode of the Report , The New York Times ran its third article on The Colbert Report , " Bringing Out the Absurdity of the News " . The article specifically discussed the segment on " truthiness " , although the Times misreported the word as " trustiness " . In its November 1 , 2005 issue , the Times ran a correction . On the next episode of the Report , Colbert took the Times to task for the error , pointing out , ironically , that " trustiness " is " not even a word " .

In its December 25 , 2005 , issue , The New York Times again discussed " truthiness " , this time as one of nine words that had captured the year 's zeitgeist , in an article titled " 2005 : In a Word ; Truthiness " by Jacques Steinberg . In crediting truthiness , Steinberg said , " the pundit who probably drew the most attention in 2005 was only playing one on TV : Stephen Colbert " .

In the January 22 , 2006 issue , columnist Frank Rich used the term seven times , with credit to Colbert , in a column titled " Truthiness 101 : From Frey to Alito " , to discuss Republican portrayals of several issues ( including the Samuel Alito nomination , the Bush administration 's response to Hurricane Katrina , and Jack Murtha 's Vietnam War record ) . Rich emphasized the extent to which the word had quickly become a cultural fixture , writing , " The mock Comedy Central pundit Stephen Colbert 's slinging of the word ' truthiness ' caught on instantaneously last year precisely because we live in the age of truthiness . " Editor & Publisher reported on Rich 's use of " truthiness " in his column , saying he " tackled the growing trend to ' truthiness , ' as opposed to truth , in the U.S. "

The New York Times published two letters on the 2006 White House Correspondents ' Dinner , where Stephen Colbert was the featured guest , in its May 3 , 2006 edition , under the headline " Truthiness and Power " .

Frank Rich referenced truthiness again in The New York Times in 2008 , describing the strategy of John McCain 's presidential campaign as being " to envelop the entire presidential race in a thick fog of truthiness " , Rich explained that the campaign was based on truthiness because " McCain , Sarah Palin and their surrogates keep repeating the same lies over and over not just to smear their opponents and not just to mask their own record . Their larger aim is to construct a bogus alternative reality so relentless it can overwhelm any haphazard journalistic stabs at puncturing it . " Rich also noted , " You know the press is impotent at unmasking this truthiness when the hardest @-@ hitting interrogation McCain has yet faced on television came on ' The View ' . Barbara Walters and Joy Behar called him on several falsehoods , including his endlessly repeated fantasy that Palin opposed earmarks for Alaska . Behar used the word ' lies ' to his face . "

= = Widespread recognition = =

Usage of " truthiness " continued to proliferate in media , politics , and public consciousness . On January 5 , 2006 , etymology professor Anatoly Liberman began an hour @-@ long program on public radio by discussing truthiness and predicting that it would be included in dictionaries in the next year or two . His prediction seemed to be on track when , the next day , the American Dialect Society announced that " truthiness " was its 2005 Word of the Year , and the website of the Macmillan English Dictionary featured truthiness as its Word of the Week a few weeks later . Truthiness was also selected by The New York Times as one of nine words that captured the spirit of 2005 . Global Language Monitor , which tracks trends in languages , named truthiness the top television buzzword of 2006 , and another term Colbert coined with reference to truthiness , wikiality , as another of the top ten television buzzwords of 2006 , the first time two words from the same show have made the list .

The word was listed in the annual " Banished Word List " released by a committee at Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste . Marie , Michigan in 2007 . The list included " truthiness " among other overused terms , such as " awesome " celebrity couple portmanteaus such as " Brangelina " , and " pwn " . In response , on January 8 , 2007 Colbert stated that Lake Superior State University was an " attention @-@ seeking second @-@ tier state university " . The 2008 List of Banished Words restored " truthiness " to formal usage , in response to the 2007 @-@ 2008 Writers Guild of America strike .

= = = American Dialect Society 's Word of the Year = = =

On January 6 , 2006 , the American Dialect Society announced that " truthiness " was selected as its 2005 Word of the Year . The Society described its rationale as follows :

In its 16th annual words of the year vote , the American Dialect Society voted truthiness as the word of the year . First heard on The Colbert Report , a satirical mock news show on the Comedy Central television channel , truthiness refers to the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes or believes to be true , rather than concepts or facts known to be true . As Stephen Colbert put it , " I don 't trust books . They 're all fact , no heart . "

= = = Merriam @-@ Webster 's Word of the Year = = =

On December 10 , 2006 the Merriam @-@ Webster Dictionary announced that " truthiness " was selected as its 2006 Word of the Year on Merriam @-@ Webster 's Words of the Year , based on a reader poll , by a 5 ? 1 margin over the second @-@ place word google . " We 're at a point where what constitutes truth is a question on a lot of people 's minds , and truth has become up for grabs " , said Merriam @-@ Webster president John Morse . " ' Truthiness ' is a playful way for us to think about a very important issue . " However , despite winning Word of the Year , the word does not appear in the 2006 edition of the Merriam @-@ Webster English Dictionary . In response to this omission , during " The Wørd " segment on December 12 , 2006 Colbert issued a new page 1344 for the tenth edition of the Merriam Webster dictionary that featured " truthiness " . To make room for the definition of " truthiness " , including a portrait of Colbert , the definition for the word " try " was removed with Colbert stating " Sorry , try . Maybe you should have tried harder . " He also sarcastically told viewers to " not " download the new page and " not " glue it in the new dictionary in libraries and schools .

= = = The New York Times crossword puzzle = = =

In the June 14 , 2008 edition of The New York Times , the word was featured as 1 @-@ across in the crossword puzzle . Colbert mentioned this during the last segment on the June 18 episode of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart , and declared himself the " King of the Crossword " .

= = = BBC " portrait of the decade " = = =

In December 2009 , the BBC online magazine asked its readers to nominate suggestions of things to be included on a poster which would represent important events in the 2000s ( decade ) , divided into five different categories : " People " , " Words " , " News " , " Objects " and " Culture " . Suggestions were sent in and a panel of five independent experts shortened each category to what they saw as the 20 most important . Among the nominations selected in the " Words " category was " Truthiness " . As a result , the word " Truthiness " appeared in the poster .

= = = Research = = =

In 2012 , a study examining truthiness was carried out by PhD student Eryn Newman of Victoria University of Wellington . The experiments showed that people are more likely to believe that a claim is true regardless of evidence when a decorative photograph appears alongside it .

= = Use in political and social commentary = =

= = = Kitty Genovese case retrospective = = =

As noted by Jesse Singal in an April 5 , 2016 piece " How the False Story of Kitty Genovese ? s Murder Went Viral " in New York Magazine upon the death of Kitty Genovese 's murderer , the entire escalation of a myth surrounding the murder , alleging that 38 people had been silent witnesses allowing a vicious death to proceed in front of them , was attributable to the myth 's appeal to " truthiness " ( grounded in fear - of insecurity and lack of community spirit ) over full investigation into actual truth :

" Today , of course , there is exponentially more news coverage than there was in 1964 ? not to mention exponentially more attempts to slot attention @-@ getting events into simple , truthy stories about human nature . The gap between the famous version of the Genovese story and the true one , then , is worth remembering , if only as a check on our natural tendency to hear a story and then nod along and say , ' Of course that ? s what happened ! ' ?

= = = James Frey controversy = = =

The Chicago Tribune published an editorial in its January 16 , 2006 issue titled " The Truthiness Hurts " , crediting the rise of truthiness as serendipitously providing an apt description of the Oprah Book Club controversy over James Frey 's fictionalized " memoir " , A Million Little Pieces . Truthiness was also used to describe the controversy over the factual accuracy of Frey 's book by USA Today in its January 15 , 2006 issue , by several other publications including The New York Times , and by the television news program Nightline on its October 23 and January 26 editions .

Oprah Winfrey also discussed truthiness with Frank Rich on her show , in reference to the Frey controversy and the column " Truthiness 101 " Rich had recently published in The New York Times . They also mentioned Colbert 's role in making the word " truthiness " .

On January 27 , MSNBC ran a commentary titled " Oprah strikes a blow for truthiness : Do facts really matter ? Ask Winfrey , James Frey or Stephen Colbert " , making the case that Winfrey 's about @-@ face on Frey 's book was a " small ( and belated ) but bold nudge back out of the proud halls of truthiness " , but also opportunistic and too little too late .

= = = In the Canadian Parliament = = =

In 2006 , Liberal Party of Canada leadership contender Ken Dryden used truthiness as an extensive theme in a speech in the House of Commons . The speech dealt critically with the Harper government 's Universal Child Care Plan . Dryden defined truthiness as " something that is spoken as if true that one wants others to believe is true , that said often enough with enough voices

orchestrated in behind it , might even sound true , but is not true . "

The transcript of all debates in the House ( Hansard ) is made available in both official languages ; the translators into French chose to render " truthiness " as *fausse vérité* ( " false truth " ) .

= = = Alleged snubbing by the Associated Press , and Colbert 's response = = =

The Associated Press reported on the American Dialect Society 's selection of truthiness as the Word of the Year , including the following comments by one of the voting linguists :

Michael Adams , a professor at North Carolina State University who specializes in lexicology , said " truthiness " means " truthy , not facty " . " The national argument right now is , one , ' Who 's got the truth ? ' and , two , ' Who 's got the facts ? ' " he said . " Until we can manage to get the two of them back together again , we 're not going to make much progress . "

On each of the first four episodes of the Report after the selection of truthiness as Word of the Year , Colbert lamented that news reports neglected to acknowledge him as the source of the word . On the first of these episodes , he added Michael Adams to his " On Notice " board , and Associated Press reporter Heather Clark , the author of the article , to his " Dead to Me " board . On the third of these episodes , he ranked the AP at the top of the " Threat @-@ Down " , one of few entries ever to gain the number one spot in place of bears . On the following episode he called Adams and asked for an apology . Though Adams never apologized , Colbert " accepted " his " apology " , but failed to take him " off notice " .

= = = Associated Press response to Colbert = = =

On January 13 , the first day after the four @-@ day run of criticism of the AP on the Report , the AP ran a story about The Colbert Report being upset about being snubbed by the AP , in an article titled " Colbert : AP the biggest threat to America " . As he has in the past , Colbert remained in character in an interview for the story , and used it to further the political satire of truthiness ; excerpts of the story are :

" When an AP story about the designation sent coast to coast failed to mention Colbert , he began a tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek crusade , not unlike the kind his muse Bill O 'Reilly might lead in all seriousness . "

" ' It 's a sin of omission ... ' Stephen Colbert told the AP on Thursday ... ' It 's like Shakespeare still being alive and not asking him what Hamlet is about , ' he said . "

" The Oxford English Dictionary has a definition for ' truthy ' dating back to the 1800s .... ' The fact that they looked it up in a book just shows that they don 't get the idea of truthiness at all , ' Stephen Colbert said Thursday . ' You don 't look up truthiness in a book , you look it up in your gut . ' "

" Though slight , the difference of Colbert 's definition and the OED 's is essential . It 's not your typical truth , but , as The New York Times wrote , ' a summation of what [ Colbert ] sees as the guiding ethos of the loudest commentators on Fox News , MSNBC and CNN . ' "

" Colbert , who referred on his program to the AP omission as a ' journalistic travesty , ' said Thursday that it was similar to the much @-@ criticized weapons of mass destruction reporting leading up to the Iraq War . ' Except , ' he said , ' people got hurt this time . ' "

On January 14 , Clark herself responded in an article titled " Exclusive ' News ' ? I 'm dead to Stephen Colbert " . She furthered the rise of " truthiness " in published English in conceding , " Truthiness be told , I never had seen The Colbert Report until my name graced its ' Dead to Me ' board this week ... But I will say that I watched Colbert 's show for the first time ... It was funny . And that 's not just truthy . That 's a fact . "

= = = Arianna Huffington = = =

On January 31 , 2006 , Arianna Huffington used truthiness in The Huffington Post . Huffington later appeared as a guest on the March 1 , 2006 , episode of The Colbert Report . She challenged Colbert on his claim that he had invented the word truthiness . During the interview , Colbert

declared , " I 'm not a truthiness fanatic ; I 'm truthiness ' father . " Huffington corrected him , citing Wikipedia , that he had merely " popularized " the term . Regarding her source , Colbert responded :  
" Fuck them ! "

= = = President George W. Bush = = =

At the 2006 White House Correspondents ' Association Dinner , Colbert , the featured guest , described President Bush 's thought processes using the definition of truthiness . Editor and Publisher used " truthiness " to describe Colbert 's criticism of Bush , in an article published the same day titled " Colbert Lampoons Bush at White House Correspondents Dinner ? President Not Amused ? " E & P reported that the " blistering comedy ' tribute ' to President Bush ... left George and Laura Bush unsmiling at its close " and that many people at the dinner " looked a little uncomfortable at times , perhaps feeling the material was a little too biting ? or too much speaking ' truthiness ' to power " . E & P reported a few days later that its coverage of Colbert at the dinner drew " possibly its highest one @-@ day traffic total ever " , and published a letter to the editor asserting that " Colbert brought truth wrapped in truthiness " . On the same weekend , The Washington Post and others also reported on the event . Six months later , in a column titled " Throw The Truthiness Bums Out " , The New York Times columnist Frank Rich called Colbert 's after @-@ dinner speech a " cultural primary " and christened it the " defining moment " of the United States ' 2006 midterm elections .

= = = Charles Krauthammer = = =

Conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer brought the term up in a discussion about President Obama on the show Fox News All @-@ Stars in June 2010 , saying :

What we see here is conditional truthiness . When the administration needs to say , oh , we knew how bad it was , it says it , and when it needs to say we had no idea how bad it was , it says it . It depends when it needs it ; it 'll invent a new truth .

= = = Cato Institute amicus brief = = =

In 2014 , the Cato Institute filed an amicus brief to the United States Supreme Court co @-@ authored by humorist P.J. O 'Rourke and legal scholar Ilya Shapiro in the Susan B. Anthony List v. Driehaus free speech case . The brief included an extended discussion of the role of truthiness in American political discourse :

In modern times , " truthiness " ? a " truth " asserted " from the gut " or because it " feels right , " without regard to evidence or logic ? is also a key part of political discourse . It is difficult to imagine life without it , and our political discourse is weakened by Orwellian laws that try to prohibit it .

After all , where would we be without the knowledge that Democrats are pinko @-@ communist flag @-@ burners who want to tax churches and use the money to fund abortions so they can use the fetal stem cells to create pot @-@ smoking lesbian ATF agents who will steal all the guns and invite the UN to take over America ? Voters have to decide whether we 'd be better off electing Republicans , those hateful , assault @-@ weapon @-@ wielding maniacs who believe that George Washington and Jesus Christ incorporated the nation after a Gettysburg reenactment and that the only thing wrong with the death penalty is that it isn 't administered quickly enough to secular @-@ humanist professors of Chicano studies .

= = " Mathiness " = =

In a 2015 article in the American Economic Review " Papers and Proceedings " , the economist Paul Romer decried " Mathiness in the Theory of Economic Growth " . Romer claims that mathematics is progressive in economics when it is rigorous and when the mathematical variables have a clear relationship to actual and plausibly measurable aspects of the economy . He writes that

in growth theory today , both aspects are frequently missing and that the resulting use of mathematics is merely mathiness .