

## LSSU may break the internet with its 41st annual list of banished words

January 1st, 2016

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. – So, if the wordsmiths at Lake Superior State University get their way, this is the last time a story lead like this will ever make it into print or broadcast.

Answering a question by beginning with the word "so" is just one of about a dozen forms of wordplay that made it onto LSSU's 41st annual List of Words Banished from the Queen's English for Mis-use, Over-use and General Uselessness. The tradition created by the late W. T. Rabe, former public relations director at Lake Superior State University, is now in its fifth decade. Compilers hope this year's list will be so popular that it will break the Internet.

“Overused words and phrases are ‘problematic’ for thousands of Queen's English ‘stakeholders,’” said an LSSU spokesperson while ‘vaping’ an e-cigarette during a ‘presser.’ “Once something is banished, there's no ‘walking it back;’ that's our ‘secret sauce, and there's no ‘price point’ for that.”

Rabe and fellow LSSU faculty and staff came up with the first list of words and phrases that people love to hate at a New Year's Eve party in 1975, publishing it on Jan. 1, 1976. Though he and his friends created the first list from their own pet peeves about language, Rabe said he knew from the volume of mail he received in the following weeks that the group would have no shortage of words and phrases from which to choose for 1977. Since then, the list has consisted entirely of nominations received from around the world throughout the year.

Through the years, LSSU has received tens of thousands of nominations for the list, which now includes more than 800 entries. This year's list is culled from nominations received mostly through the university's website, [Issu.edu/banished](http://Issu.edu/banished). Word-watchers target pet peeves from everyday speech, as well as from the news, fields of education, technology, advertising, politics and more. A committee makes a final cut in late December.

For more information about Word Banishment and previous years' lists, visit [Issu.edu/banished](http://Issu.edu/banished). The site includes history and a form for submitting words and phrases. Word-watchers may check the alphabetical "complete list" on the website before making their submissions.

And now, the 2016 list:

### **SO**

So the word that received the most nominations this year was already banished, but today it is being used differently than it was in 1999, when nominators were saying, “I am SO down with this list!” Nominations came from across the country. “Currently, it is being overused as the first word in the answer to ANY question. For instance, “How did you learn to play the piano?” Answer: “So my dad was in a classical music club...” – Bob Forrest, Tempe Ariz.

“Tune in to any news channel and you’ll hear it. The word serves no purpose in the sentence and to me is like fingernails on a chalkboard. So, I submit the extra, meaningless, and overused word ‘so.’” – Scott Shackleton, Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

“Politicians, especially, are using this word when asked a question and not answering said question. It is used by all parties in Canada's Federal election. – Karen Newton, Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

“Frequently used to begin a sentence, particularly in response to a question, this tiresome and grammatically incorrect replacement for “Like,” or “Um,” is even more irksome...It hurts my ears, every single time I hear it! -- Thomas H. Weiss, Mt. Pleasant, Mich.

“So it's getting really annoying. So can we please put a stop to this?” -- David G. Simpson, Laurel, Md.

“It has become widespread to the point of an epidemic,” said a sickened John from Philadelphia, Penn.

## **CONVERSATION**

Online publications invite us to “join the conversation,” which is usually more of a scream-fest. Gayle from Cedarville, Mich. wonders if “debate has become too harsh for our delicate sensibilities. Now we are all encouraged to have a ‘conversation,’ and everything will somewhat be magically resolved.”

“Over the past five years or so, this word has been increasingly used by talking heads on radio, television and in political circles to describe every form of verbal communication known to mankind. It has replaced ‘discussion,’ ‘debate,’ ‘chat,’ ‘discourse,’ ‘argument,’ ‘lecture,’ ‘talk’...all of which can provide some context to the nature of the communication. Perhaps the users feel that it is a word that is least likely to offend people, but I consider it to be imprecise language that, over time, dumbs down the art of effective discourse.” – Richard Fry, Marathon, Ont.

“Used by every media type without exception. No one listens.” – Richard Seitz, Charleston, Ill.

“Have one, start one, engage in one. Enough.” – Fred Rogers, Houston, Tex.

We are invited to “join the conversation if we want to give an opinion. This expression is overused and it is annoying. Thanks for listening, eh.” – Debbie Irwin, Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

## **PROBLEMATIC**

“A corporate-academic weasel word,” according to the Urban Dictionary.

“Somewhere along the line, this word became a trendy replacement for ‘that is a problem.’ I just hate it.” -- Sharon Martin, Hagerstown, Md.

“Anything that the speaker finds vaguely inconvenient or undesirable, such as an opposing political belief or bad traffic. Contrast things that are self-evidently taken to be problematic with, say, actual problems like a hole in the ozone layer or a job loss.” -- Adam Rosen, Asheville, N.C.

## **STAKEHOLDER**

A word that has expanded from describing someone who may actually have a stake in a situation or problem, now being over-used in business to describe customers and others.

“Often used with ‘engagement.’ If someone is disengaged, they’re not really a stakeholder in the first place. LSSU, please engage your stakeholders by adding this pretentious jargon to your list. -- Gwendolyn Barlow, Portland, Ore.

Harley Carter of Calgary, Alberta, says he has heard it with another word popular in business-speak, “socialize,” which means to spread an idea around to see what others think of it. “We need to socialize this concept with our ‘stakeholders.’”

“Dr. Van Helsing should be the only stake holder,” says Jeff Baenen of Minneapolis, Minn.

## **PRICE POINT**

Another example of using two words when one will do.

“This alliterative mutation seems to be replacing the word ‘price’ or ‘cost.’ It may be standard business-speak, but must it contaminate everyday speech?” says Kevin Carney of Chicago, who provided an example in the March 19, 2015 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine, pg. 1171, which says, “Although the ‘price point’ of effective new drugs...may initially be out of reach for many patients...”

“It has no ‘point.’ It is just a ‘price.’” -- Guy Michael, Cherry Hill, N.J.

## **SECRET SAUCE**

“Usually used in a sentence explaining the ‘secret’ in excruciating public detail. Is this a metaphor for business success based on the fast food industry?” -- John Beckett, Ann Arbor, Mich.

“It has become too frequent in business discussions. I am tired of it.” -- Bill Evans, Clinton, Miss.

**BREAK THE INTERNET** -- A phrase that is annoying online word-watchers around the world.

“An annoying bit of hyperbole about the latest saucy picture or controversy that is already becoming trite.” -- Tim Bednall, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

“Meaning a post or video or whatever will have so much Internet traffic that it will ‘break the internet.’ It’s being used for every headline and video. Ridiculous.” -- Matthew Squires, Auburn, Mich.

“I hope the list doesn’t ‘break the internet.’ (How else would I read it next year)?” -- Dean Hinrichs, Kansas City, Mo.

## **WALK IT BACK**

A slower back-pedal?

“It seems as if every politician who makes a statement has to ‘walk it back,’ meaning retract the statement, or explain it in laborious detail to the extent that the statement no longer has any validity or meaning once it has been ‘walked back.’” -- Max Hill, Killeen, Tex.

## **PRESSER**

This shortened form of “press release” and “press conference” is not so impressive.

“Not only is there no intelligent connection between the word “presser” and its supposed meaning, this word already has a definition: a person or device that removes wrinkles. Let’s either say ‘press conference’ or ‘press release’ or come up with something more original, intelligent and interesting!” – Constance Kelly, West Bloomfield, Mich.

“This industry buzzword has slipped into usage in news reporting and now that they have started, they can’t seem to stop using it.” -- Richard W. Varney, Akron, Ohio.

## **MANSPREADING**

A word that is familiar to those in bigger cities, where seats on the bus or subway are sometimes difficult to find.

“Men don’t need another disgusting-sounding word thrown into the vocabulary to describe something they do... You’re just taking too much room on this train seat, be a little more polite...” – Carrie Hansen, Caledonia, Mich.

“The term itself is stupid, and the campaign and petition written by men’s rights activists claiming that men need to take up more space due to their anatomy, and that anti-manspreading campaigns are ‘male-bashing,’ are ridiculous. The problem is with people taking up too much space on the subway or any public mode of transportation. – Beth, Anchorage, Alaska

## **VAPE**

Vape and vaping are used to describe the act of ‘smoking’ e-cigarettes (another strange word) since the products emit vapor instead of smoke.

David Ervin of Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., says he hopes the word “goes up in smoke.”

**GIVING ME LIFE** – “I suggest banishing this hyperbole for over-use,” says Ana Robbins, Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

The phrase refers to anything that may excite a person, or something that causes one to laugh.

“This list of banished words is ‘giving me life!’”

### **PHYSICALITY**

We had to include one for the sports fans. John Kollig of Jamestown, N.Y., says this is overused by every sports broadcaster and writer.

“I am not sure who is responsible, but over the last 12-18 months you cannot watch a sporting event, listen to a sports talk show on radio, or anything on ESPN without someone using this term to attempt to describe an athlete or a contest.” -- Dan Beitzel, Perrysburg, Ohio

“Every time I hear them say it, I change the channel.” – Brenda Ruffing, Jackson, Mich.

“What the heck does it mean?” – Linda Pardy, Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.