

## **46th Annual List Of Banished Words Press Release**

Dec. 31, 2020

### **COVID-19 Terminology Tops Lake Superior State University's Annual Banished Words List Just in Time for the Vaccination Rollout**

Sault Ste. Marie, MI — Enough already with COVID-19!

People across the U.S. and around the world let Lake Superior State University know that they're tired not only of the coronavirus pandemic but also of hearing, reading, and talking about it—especially when the communication is bad or excessive.

COVID-19 terminology monopolized submissions for LSSU's annual Banished Words List this year. Out of 1,450-plus nominations, upwards of 250 of the words and terms suggested for banishment for overuse, misuse, or uselessness relate to the coronavirus. In fact, seven of the 10 words and terms that LSSU is banishing for 2021 are about it.

Ranked No. 1 to get rid of is what started of all this: "COVID-19" itself.

"It should surprise no one that this year's list was dominated by words and terms related to COVID-19," said Peter Szatmary, executive director of marketing and communications. "LSSU's Banished Words List has reflected signs of the times since debuting in the mid-1970s, and the zeitgeist this year is: We're all in this together by banishing expressions like 'We're all in this together.' To be sure, COVID-19 is unprecedented in wreaking havoc and destroying lives. But so is the overreliance on 'unprecedented' to frame things, so it has to go, too."

LSSU has compiled an annual Banished Words List since 1976 to uphold, protect, and support excellence in language by encouraging avoidance of words and terms that are overworked, redundant, oxymoronic, clichéd, illogical, nonsensical—and otherwise ineffective, baffling, or irritating. Over the decades, LSSU has received tens of thousands of nominations for the list, which now totals more than 1,000 entries. This year, nominations came from most major U.S. cities and many U.S. states, as well as from Australia, the Czech Republic, England, and Canada. Here are the list of the banished words and terms for 2021 and the reasons for their banishment:

#### **1. COVID-19 (COVID, coronavirus, Rona)**

A large number of nominators are clearly resentful of the virus and how it has overtaken our vocabulary. No matter how necessary or socially and medically useful these words are, the committee cannot help but wish we could banish them along with the virus itself. Coincidentally, this list arrives as does a vaccine—the committee hopes this proves a type of double whammy.

#### **2. Social distancing**

This phrase is useful, as wearing a mask and keeping your distance have a massive effect on preventing the spread of infection. But we'd be lying if we said we weren't ready for this phrase to become

“useless.” With north of 50 nominations, many others clearly feel the same, and the tone of their reasoning ranged from impatient to heartfelt.

### 3. **We’re all in this together**

This phrase was likely intended as a way to keep everyone feeling safe and calm at the start of the pandemic. However, as the virus made its way across the globe and nation, it became clear that we are all dealing with COVID-19 in different ways and that we confront some vastly different challenges in coping with it. As with many words that show up on the list, its usefulness has faded.

### 4. **In an abundance of caution (various phrasings)**

Yes, humanity needs to follow safeguards during COVID-19. The statistics are sobering: more than 342,000 deaths and more than 19 million confirmed cases in the U.S. and more than 1.8 million deaths and more than 82 million confirmed cases worldwide. But the phrasing about how to take preventative steps is vague. What is the standard measurement for caution, metric or U.S. standard?

### 5. **In these uncertain times (various phrasings)**

The committee agrees that COVID-19 has upended everyday life and wishes this weren’t so. But putting things into imprecise context doesn’t help matters. The blur dilutes reality and, to some, sounds like the beginning of a movie trailer. Keep as wide a berth of trite parlance as those who don’t wear masks in public. What exactly does it mean for times to be uncertain? Look at a clock!

### 6. **Pivot**

Reporters, commentators, talking heads, and others from the media reference how everyone must adapt to the coronavirus through contactless delivery, virtual learning, curbside pickup, video conferencing, remote working, and other urgent readjustments. That’s all true and vital. But basketball players pivot; let’s keep it that way.

### 7. **Unprecedented**

It’s unheard of that a word would be repeated on the Banished Words List. Actually, it’s not. In the early years, words wound up repeated, although we try to avoid repetition nowadays. Despite the fact that “unprecedented” was banished in 2002, given that it was nominated many times this year for misuse in describing events that do have precedent, inclusion again seems warranted.

2021 Banished Words and Terms Not About COVID-19:

### 8. **Karen**

What began as an anti-racist critique of the behavior of white women in response to Black and Brown people has become a misogynist umbrella term for critiquing the perceived overemotional behavior of women. As one nominator said about reasons for its banishment, “I would tell you why, but I’d sound like a Karen.” Another critic observed, “Offensive to all normal people named Karen.”

### 9. **Sus**

It’s a shortened version for “suspicious” in the video game *Among Us*. No committee members play, but our children who do explained that this multiplayer online social game is designed around identifying “sus” imposters so they can be “thrown into the lava.” Complainers a) ask: How much effort does it take to say the entire word; and b) request: If that can’t happen, confine the syllable to the gaming world.

### 10. **I know, right?**

An amusing phrase flooding social media, “I know, right?” is a relatively new construction to convey empathy with those who have expressed agreement. But as one wordsmith put it, if you know, why do you need to ask if it’s correct or seek further approval? Another grammarian suggested that the desire for confirmation connotes insecurity. In other words, it’s reiterating something already seconded.

“Real-world concerns preoccupied word watchdogs this year, first and foremost COVID-19, and that makes sense,” said LSSU President Dr. Rodney S. Hanley. “In a small way, maybe this list will help ‘flatten the curve,’ which also was under consideration for banishment. We trust that your ‘new normal’—another contender among nominations—for next year won’t have to include that anymore.”