

NWL2020 Second Draft Report

Revised 2020-08-20

The NASPA Dictionary Committee (DC) has completed work on the second draft of the NASPA Word List 2020 Edition (NWL2020) and the NASPA School Word List 2020 Edition (NSWL2020), and recommends their adoption as presented below.

As directed by the NASPA Executive Committee (EC), NWL2020 will consist of those words found in NWL2018 that have not been identified as offensive slurs; NSWL2020 will have corresponding changes.

We are thankful to our fellow NASPA committees for their valuable advice, but take full responsibility for our decisions concerning these revised word lists.

Timeline

- 2020-06-11: NASPA member Jim Hughes proposes deleting some offensive slurs in a Facebook post by César Del Solar.
- 2020-07-06: EC agrees with Hasbro that all offensive slurs should be removed from NWL2020 to align with planned Hasbro SCRABBLE rule changes.
- 2020-08-20: This document is published.
- 2020-08-29: Deadline for submitting any feedback to info@scrabbleplayers.org
- 2020-09-01: Original target effective date of NWL2020
- 2020-09-02: Planned publication date of final DC report on NWL2020
- 2020-09-15: NASPA Advisory Board to determine effective date of NWL2020
- 2020-10-01: Projected date of publication for NWL2020
- 2020-10-18: DC to meet online to discuss resuming regular editorial work on other projects, including:
 - next edition code-named NWL202x, including 11-letter words from the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (2nd edition), any corrections identified in the interim, assessment of member suggestions;
 - updating the online list of offensive slurs as needed;
 - adding and editing definitions for NWL entries.

Discussion

Our community has long recognized that offensive terms of abuse or dysphemism (slurs), even when regarded merely as character strings for wordplay, cast undue negative light upon the SCRABBLE brand when used over the board. After consultation, NASPA and Hasbro agreed to modify their respective rules to ban the use of offensive slurs in licensed play.

The DC established guidelines to identify offensive slurs and applied those guidelines to the words identified as candidates. As is already done with special categories such as other offensive words, trademarks, implicit inflections, and typographical errors in source lexica, the Committee will update the NASPA Word Database to show which words have been reviewed in the current process, and how the Committee reached its decisions about categorizing offensive slurs. No words will be deleted from the database, as to do so would breach its lexicographical integrity and prevent players from understanding the reasons why some words are valid for play and others are not.

We define offensive slurs as those words not only abusive or disparaging to protected categories of people, but also sufficiently repugnant to have merited formal lexicographic recognition.

Words can become more or less offensive just as they can be removed from or added to our source lexica. For instance, usage notes in source lexica show that "scaramouch" and "shaker" once had pejorative connotations and might formerly have been classified as offensive, but are no longer regarded as such by authorities. Conversely, some offensive slurs have been partially reclaimed by their targets, but we found no cases (among over a dozen words in the process of being reclaimed) where lexicographical usage notes overturned tags indicating offensiveness.

We judged that regional and contextual differences occasionally indicated some versions of a root word were more offensive than others: for instance, the combined testimony of our authorities indicates that the American spelling "graybeard" is less offensive in its regions of use than the Canadian spelling "greybeard", and so only "greybeard" was categorized as an offensive slur, to best reflect its edge-case status. The DC also deleted several words from the school list to create NSWL2020, as necessitated by the categorization process.

The DC recommends the use of the multiplication sign (\times alone, or x with a space) as the new symbol in Zyzzyva for identifying offensive slurs in NWL2020.

Formal Definition

The search for offensive words included consultation with dictionary publishers and other advisors, review of historical lists of offensive words, and assiduous investigation of open sources. After review of over 2,500 candidate word forms, the DC selected the following criteria as resulting in the most reasonable categorization of offensive slurs.

- The candidate word is currently a valid dictionary entry (prior to the rules change, it met the ordinary lexicographic criteria for a full-dictionary list of closed-form alphabetic-character words of 2 to 15 letters and was originally taken from one of the seven standard North American dictionary families listed below). It is also present neither in the Official SCRABBLE Players Dictionary (6th Edition) nor in the SCRABBLE Word Finder at scrabble.merriam.com (SWF), which have already been screened against offensive slurs by Merriam-Webster.
- The word is offensive: at a minimum, the word is labeled with an offensiveness tag in all senses in any one of the up to seven current dictionaries in which it appears, or was clearly omitted from OSPD as offensive while present in the corresponding tournament word list (i.e., OSPD3 with OTCWL; OSPD4 with OTCWL2; OSPD5 with OTCWL2014).
 - Offensiveness tags are defined to include abusive, coarse, contemptuous, derisive, derogatory, dismissive, disparaging, hostile, obscene, offensive, opprobrious, pejorative, and vulgar (as well as the noun forms abuse, contempt, derision, disparagement, and hostility).
 - Other tags were not considered indicators of offensiveness, such as merely affectionate, condescending, disapproving, facetious, humorous, impolite, insulting, ironic, jocular, patronizing, playful, pretentious, sarcastic, scornful, or whimsical. Also, the Webster's New World usage tag "slur" was not considered because it was always accompanied by more specific labels.
 - Degrees of offensiveness were not considered (among a minority, by many, by some, chiefly, especially, extremely, frequently, generally, mainly, mild, mildly, mostly, not generally, not normally, often, sometimes, somewhat, traditionally, typically, usually). Age of offensiveness was not considered except to exclude words only formerly offensive.
- The word is a slur: at a minimum, one of the known senses of the word applies solely to protected categories of personal identity as covered by the NASPA Code of Conduct: "race, color, creed or religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, marital status, military status, or disability."
 - Protection does not necessarily extend to other categories protected by law or custom but not stated in the Code, such as (without limitation) age under 40, avocation or vocation, corporate or group status, other familial status, genetic information, intelligence level or medical condition other than disability, political activity or belief, pregnancy, relation to the speaker, rural or urban status, socioeconomic class, veteran status, or generalized abuse categories (imputing

offensive anatomical, profane, prurient, scatological, or vulgar categorization without specific application).

- Any future recommendations for lexicography-based changes to protected categories will be submitted from the DC to the EC as recommended Code of Conduct enhancements.
- This process results in two lists: a longer list of words categorized as offensive slurs according to at least one of their senses, and a shorter sublist of words so categorized according to all of their senses. The next and final draft of this document will determine which categorization will be used for NWL2020.
- Usage notes from a target word form apply to variant word forms (such as respellings, affixed forms, run-ons, undefined list entries, capitalization, etc.) when online or print dictionaries link the variants to the target.

Word Lists

Because of the explicit language involved, the lists of offensive slurs are published for our adult members at the password-protected NASPA Member Services website:

<http://scrabbleplayers.org/cgi-bin/doc.pl?did=45>

There, each word is listed in alphabetical order, with a link to its entry in the NASPA Word Database, explaining the grounds on which its categorization has been proposed.

At this time, the minimum criteria are met by 269 words. They are divided into 193 words and inflections that were found to be offensive and personally applicable in not just one but all senses; and 76 words and inflections that were found to be offensive in at least one dictionary and personally applicable in at least one sense, but not offensive and personally applicable in all senses. The Committee will determine the final status of these two lists of words in the final draft of this document.

It will be observed that the root form of each word is a noun applicable to protected personal identity (root nouns are themselves offensive except for “Jew”, offensive only as a lowercase adjective or verb, and “pope”, a narrow but protected class), even if the slur itself may be a derived word such as “nonpapists”.

The following root words were originally proposed as offensive slurs but did not meet the criteria above:

- “Graybeard” (MW, WNW, AH) appears as inoffensive in SCRABBLE Word Finder.
- Inoffensive words in all references include “baldie” (COD), “bumboy” (COD), “butches” (MW, WNW, AH, RH), and “shemale” (OCD).
- “Fatso” (MW, WNW, AH, RH) is not currently considered a legal disability.
- “Baywop” (COD) and “hicksville” (COD) apply only to generic geographical categorization.

In addition to candidate offensive slurs, 14 words from NSWL2018 no longer meet the criteria for school lists (i.e., they are not in OSPD6 or SWF and are offensive in all senses in at least one authority), and are therefore also listed in the Member Services document.

Authorities

For this project, the DC referred primarily to the original source lexica used to construct NWL2018 and its predecessors, and secondarily to available later editions and online versions to research changes in offensiveness over time. Primary authorities determine whether or not a word is valid for play; secondary authorities may overrule primary authorities in determining whether or not a word is a candidate offensive slur.

- AH: American Heritage College Dictionary
 - Primary: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th editions
 - Secondary: 5th Edition (unabridged) and online version at ahdictionary.com/word/search.html and yourdictionary.com
- COD: Canadian Oxford Dictionary
 - Primary: 2nd Edition
- FW: Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary
 - Primary: 1973 Edition
 - Secondary: funkandwagnalls.com
- MW: Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
 - Primary: 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th editions
 - Secondary: merriam-webster.com dictionary tab, excluding entries marked with specific sources such as their unabridged or medical dictionaries
- OCD: Oxford College Dictionary
 - Primary: 2nd Edition
- RH: Random House Webster's College Dictionary
 - Primary: 1st and 2nd editions
 - Secondary: Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd Edition, and online version at dictionary.com and infoplease.com/dictionary
- WNW: Webster's New World College Dictionary
 - Primary: 2nd, 3rd, and 4th editions
 - Secondary: 5th Edition and online version at yourdictionary.com