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AAVE (*n*)

AAVE is an abbreviation of African American Vernacular English. It is a form of Black American slang also known as Ebonics. Some examples in this book are *bling*, *ratchet*, and *hood*.

Popular since 1996 but first used two decades earlier.

abandon ship (*v, inf*)

1. To leave an organization or enterprise.

◆ *We lost the election because many voters abandoned ship.*

Used since the late 1800s.

2. To leave a sinking vessel.

◆ *Rats are the first to abandon a sinking ship.*

Used since the 11th century.

abdicate one's responsibilities (*v*)

To fail to meet one's obligations. To neglect one's duties.

◆ *The night watchman abdicated his responsibilities when he fell asleep.*

Used since the late 1500s.

ableism (*n*)

Mistreatment, prejudice, and discrimination of the handicapped by able-bodied people.

◆ *Not building ramps or bathrooms for people with disabilities is a form of ableism.*

First recorded in 1986.

ableist language (*n*)

Some old-fashioned phrases referencing disabilities may be hurtful to handicapped people and should be avoided in their presence.

◆ *turn a blind eye, blind spot, fall on deaf ears, blind to the truth, blind as a bat, deaf as a post*

Used since around 1990.

abolitionism (*n*)

Abolitionism was the movement which

ended slavery that went on for three hundred years prior to the emancipation of slaves in 1865. Modern-day abolitionists attempt to reduce the proportion of African Americans in the prison population claiming unfair treatment by the justice system.

First recorded in 1831.

abominable snowman (*n*)

A large, ape-like, hairy creature from the Himalayan mountains. The term is sexist because it excludes the female version of snowman. *Snowperson* would be a better option.

◆ *bigfoot, yeti, rakshasa.*

◆ *The abominable snowman exists only in legends and fairy tales.*

Used since 1921.

above my pay grade, it's (*adv, inf*)

Dealing with this problem exceeds my ability or authority.

◆ *Making such crucial decisions is above my pay grade.*

Originally a military phrase. Used since the 1960s.

above suspicion, be (*adv*)

To be assumed innocent.

◆ *in the clear, not guilty.*

◆ *When the conspiracy was investigated, even General Rommel was not above suspicion.*

Caesar's wife must be above suspicion attributed to Julius Caesar. He divorced his unfaithful third wife but maintained to have had no knowledge of her affair. Reported by Plutarch and Suetonius around 100 A.D.

absence makes the heart grow fonder (*proverb*)

If two lovers are apart, their affection grows.

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Written by the Roman poet Sextus Aurelius Propertius in 15 B.C. First cited in America by Benjamin Franklin in 1755.

absent are always in the wrong, the (*proverb*)

We always blame those who are not present because they cannot defend themselves.

First recorded in the 1440s.

absent without leave; AWOL (*adv*)

Away from one's job or post without permission.

◆ *The senator was AWOL at the crucial vote.*

US military acronym used since World War I, 1916.

absolutely (*adv, excl*)

The word *absolutely* and its emphatic version, *absolutely positively*, were banished by the language police in 2023 because it is hackneyed and overused. It should be replaced with its synonyms: *definitely, certainly, decidedly, or unquestionably*.

Used in the sense "yes, quite so" since the early 1800s.

absorgender (*n*)

It is possible for people to absorb the genders of the people around them. They may add these genders to the ones they feel. As a result, their "base" gender can be different from time to time. In this sense we can talk about *absorbinary, absorgirl* and *absorboy*.

LGBTQ term used since 2013.

abuse (*n*)

Maltreatment or molestation.

◆ *child abuse, elder abuse, sexual abuse, self-abuse* = masturbation.

The noun *abuse* has been used since the mid-1400s.

AC/DC (*adj, sl*)

A person attracted to both sexes. Bisexual.

◆ *Nancy's boyfriend is AC/DC.*

The phrase comes from the abbreviation of alternating current/direct current electricity. Used as slang since 1940.

academically fragile (*adj*)

Students who require academic support due to learning disabilities.

◆ *We have remedial courses for academically fragile students.*

Popular since 1990, banished in 2001.

academically/educationally subnormal (*adj*)

A slow learner.

● *slow on the uptake, intellectually stunted, no Einstein.*

◆ *Special ed can help academically subnormal students.*

Used since 1944.

accentuate the positive (*v*)

To take an optimistic view of things. To stress only the good points. To eliminate the negative.

◆ *An educator should always accentuate the positive.*

Used since the 1300s. Also, the title of a famous 1944 Johnny Mercer-Harold Arlen song performed by Bing Crosby.

access controller (*n*)

The old synonyms *doorman, porter, doorkeeper*, and *gatekeeper* are sexist and avoidable.

● *doorperson.*

Access control systems using a pin number were introduced in 1967. The figurative use as "doorman" came in the early 2000s.

accessory after the fact (*n*)

A person who aids and abets a lawbreaker after the crime. An accomplice after the crime.

◆ *If you hide a fugitive, you are an accessory after the fact.*

Used since 1769.

accident (*n*)

1. Involuntary urination (bedwetting) or defecation (soiling one's bed).

◆ *The toddler had an accident last night.*

Used since the late 1800s.

2. Unwanted pregnancy or a child born because of it.

The phrase *accident of birth* was first used in the late 1600s.

accident/disaster (just) waiting to happen, an (*n*)

1. An object or person placed in harm's way.

◆ *This protruding nail is an accident waiting to happen.*

2. A clumsy, bungling person.

◆ *A drunk driver is an accident waiting to happen.*

First recorded in both senses in 1905.

accidentally on purpose, do something (v, inf)

To do something intentionally while pretending that it was just an accident.

◆ *My brother knocked over my cup accidentally on purpose.*

Used since 1682.

accommodate oneself (v)

To urinate.

● *to answer nature's call.*

◆ *You can accommodate yourself in the woods.*

Used since the late 1400s.

according to Hoyle (adv, inf)

Based on the best authority.

◆ *According to Hoyle, you have a refund coming.*

Edmond Hoyle wrote a rule book for card games in the 1740s. His name became synonymous with professional opinion.

Used since the 1750s.

ace (adj)

Abbreviated form of *asexual* or not interested in sex.

LGBTQ term used since 2011.

ace a test (v, sl)

To get an A (the highest score) on a test.

● inf: *to pass a test with flying colors.*

◆ *I am going to ace this test.*

Used since the 1950s.

Achilles' heel (n)

Someone's weakness or vulnerable point.

◆ *Mathematics was the student's Achilles' heel.*

Legend has it that Achilles, the strongest warrior in the ancient Greek army was invulnerable except on his heel. When his secret was betrayed, he was killed by a poisoned arrow directed at his heel. Used in the US since around 1855.

acid (n, sl)

Lysergic acid diethylamide or LSD.

◆ *If you use LSD, you are an acid head.*

LSD is a psychedelic drug used by hippies in the 1960s. It could alter thoughts, feelings, and behavior, causing the user to lose touch with reality.

acid test (of something), the (n)

The decisive proof of quality.

● *litmus test.*

◆ *The sales figures are the acid test of a new product.*

Literal meaning: distinguishing gold from other similar-looking metals with a test using citric acid. Used idiomatically since 1881.

acorn academy (n, sl, joc)

Institution for mental patients.

● sl: *nut house, lunatic asylum.*

◆ *You should be locked up in an acorn academy.*

Probably used since the early 1900s.

acquire a taste for something (v)

To learn to like or appreciate something.

◆ *In Russia, I acquired a taste for caviar.*

Some foods don't please you at once; using them requires an *acquired taste*. First recorded in the 1800s.

across the board; across-the-board (adv, adj)

Applying to everybody in a group. Affecting every category.

◆ *This an across-the-board wage increase.*

Used since the early 1900s.

act in bad faith (v)

To have malicious motives. To cheat.

● *to commit a breach of faith or trust.*

◆ *The plaintiff claims that you have acted in bad faith.*

The phrase is part of existentialist philosophy developed by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in the 1950s.

act in good faith (v)

To do something with honorable intentions. To show goodwill. To mean no harm.

◆ *The parties entered the contract acting in good faith [bona fide].*

Used since the 1350s.

act like one's shit doesn't stink (v, rude sl)

To be arrogant, condescending, conceited.

● sl: *to be hung up on oneself.*

African American Vernacular English, used since 1960 or even earlier.

act of faith, an (n)

Proof or display of one's devotion to God.

◆ *Believing in life after death is an act of faith.*