

Creating Words: Is Lexicography for You?

Lexicographers decide which words should be included in dictionaries. They may decide that a word is currently just a fad, and so they'll wait to see whether it will become a permanent addition to the language. In the past several decades, words such as *hippie* and *yuppie* have survived being fads and are now found in regular, not just slang, dictionaries. Other words, such as *medicare*, were created to fill needs. And yet other words have come from trademark names, for example, *escalator*. Here are some writing options:

1. While you probably had to memorize vocabulary words throughout your school years, you undoubtedly also learned many other words and ways of speaking and writing without even noticing it. What factors are bringing about changes in the language you now speak and write? Classes? Songs? Friends? Have you ever influenced the language that someone else speaks?
2. How often do you use a dictionary or thesaurus? What helps you learn a new word and remember its meaning?
3. Practice being a lexicographer: Define a word that you know isn't in the dictionary, or create a word or set of words that you think is needed. When is it appropriate to use this term? Please give some sample dialogue or describe a specific situation in which you would use the term. For inspiration, you can read the short article in the Writing Center by James Chiles about the term he has created "messismo"—a word for "true bachelor housekeeping."
4. Or take a general word such as "good" or "friend" and identify what it means in different contexts or the different categories contained within the word. For example, is what makes a book "good" the same thing as what makes a movie "good"? How many different kinds of "friends" do you have?