

**LEXICON:**  
*American Style*

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**A tribute to George Carlin and the remarkable effect the “Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television” can have on a young mind.**

***LEXICON:***

- the total inventory of the words used in a language by a group of people
- the linguistics of a language
- a stock of terms used for a certain profession, subject or style
- a book containing the words of a language



# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	i
SECTION 1: EXISTING WORDS .....	1
SECTION 2: NEW WORDS and COMBO-WORDS .....	36
SECTION 3: PHRASES, PREFIXES, SUFFIXES and CONTRACTIONS .....	43
SECTION 4: NAMES.....	55
SECTION 5: MISCELLANEOUS LISTS.....	81
SECTION 6: RANDOM RAMBLINGS .....	84
SECTION 7: DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY (and SHITTY) .....	87



# INTRODUCTION

It's the summer of 1973 and at 11 years old, I'm teetering on the brink of blissful boyhood innocence and raunchy adolescent tomfoolery. My parents, having been raised under the suffocating religious intolerance of 1950s Holland, Michigan, whisked my older sister and me away to the "big city" of Grand Rapids and were determined to provide us with more intellectual and spiritual freedom in our upbringing. Along with progressive comedies on television like *Laugh-In* and *All in the Family* and gender-bending rock music from David Bowie, there were the comedy record albums of one Mr. George Carlin.

The first of his albums I was exposed to was "FM and AM", released in 1972, which I immediately found hilarious and incredibly clever. That someone could use words, voices and inflections to produce such outrageous comedy was astounding. And then, later that year, came Carlin's album "Class Clown", a much more adult-oriented collection of comedic material. In particular, the controversial, groundbreaking (many would say mind-warping) piece entitled "Seven Words You Can Never Say On Television."

For those of you who have never heard this bit, as you can imagine, these seven words are, for the most part, very profane and quite frankly, disturbing to some ears. But, being the well-traveled, rugged decade-old lad I was, these certainly were not words I had never heard before or didn't know the meaning of. As all parents know, nothing spreads faster from mouth to ear between our children than words and thoughts that are deemed naughty or off limits. However, to hear these taboo words used so unabashedly, so repetitively, so

damn cleverly and way out of context was, in my mind, breakthrough genius.

To this day, I appreciate that my parents had the open-mindedness and trust in me to expose me to this radical, edgy humor. And ever since that summer, I have had a heightened and peculiar fascination with words, vocabulary and spelling (and not just the dirty words!).

And so, thanks to George Carlin, for the past 40 or so years I've been assembling this weird, goofy, annoying collection of words in my slightly larger than normal head. To the point where I finally realized that if I didn't get these thoughts out onto paper or computer, that I might just end up a babbling idiot...err, more of a babbling idiot, in my later years. So, what should be literary catharsis for me just may be non-sensical drivel for you...if so, I'm sorry.

I hope that some of my observations and interpretations will cause you to pause, ponder, muse and perhaps even giggle...if even only slightly as much as Mr. Carlin did to this 11-year-old youngster in West Michigan. FYI...the working title of this book was "By George, These Words Are F'd Up."

For those of you who don't know who George Carlin was, a short bio is in order. He is widely regarded as one of the most important and influential stand-up comedians of modern American society. Carlin was famous for his "off-color" comedy and his observations on language, politics, psychology, religion and many subjects of the time considered "taboo" such as drugs, profanity and governmental control. Another favorite target for his humor were the excesses and hypocrisies of American culture.

George Carlin's "Seven Dirty Words" routine elevated him to the center of public awareness and to the top of the comedian food chain. This controversial material was a vital part of the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court case *F.C.C. vs. Pacifica Foundation* that resulted in a five to four

decision affirming the government's power to regulate indecent material on public airwaves. It also ruled that the routine was "indecent but not obscene."

Throughout his career Carlin won five Grammy awards, two American Comedy awards (and their Lifetime Achievement award in 2001), produced 25 albums, appeared in 18 movies and 23 TV programs, wrote seven books, was featured in 15 HBO specials and was the first guest host of *Saturday Night Live* in 1976. After suffering several heart attacks throughout his life, Mr. Carlin passed away in 2008 at the age of 71. (Note: Some of you younger readers may only know George Carlin as the narrator and Mr. Conductor on the Thomas the Train children's television show, which he did from 1991-1995.)

And so it is with great admiration and appreciation that I dedicate this work to the late, legendary comedian George Carlin...thank you for all the thoughts you provoked, the minds you opened, the hearts you filled with laughter, and of course, the mouths you filled with obscenities! Ha!!

### **MY SPECIAL PURPOSE**

My initial purpose in writing this literary trip down the rabbit hole was to honor a ground-breaking comedian. But, it's also come to my realization while writing that I'm also doing it for my love of words. I hope I can expose you and other readers to some of the wonders and mysteries of our English language.

I've been told that many languages have but one or two words to describe something. In our language, it is the rare word that only has a couple of other words with a similar meaning. Our language offers multiple words to communicate similar messages. We are blessed with the ability to choose the most descriptive word from many to accurately convey our thoughts.

When I question or ridicule the odd or inconsistent elements in our language in this book, it is only because I want more people to be able to learn more words, more easily. If we would change the spellings and definitions of our words to be consistent, it would make it so much easier for our young students and foreigners to learn and adopt even more words into their vocabulary. At a time where we have more non-English speaking residents than ever in our history, we should consider making our language as easy to learn for everyone as possible. I fear that if we do not, a host of expressive, but difficult words will likely be dropped forever from our daily mainstream communications.

Our society has progressed rapidly in terms of mechanical sophistication and technological advancements but, unfortunately, our lexicon has gone quite the opposite way. To witness this, simply watch an old movie from the 1930s or 1940s...the dialogue will almost certainly be filled with a wide, colorful array of rich and varied words never spoken in today's flicks.

### **DISCLAIMER CENTRAL**

I am not an English scholar, nor do I play one on TV...but I did stay in a Holiday Inn Express last night!

Simply put, I wrote this book based on my observations, disconnects and musings about our American lexicon. The closest thing I have to any authority to write this book is the English award I received as a graduating high school senior. For this, I received a handy plastic-covered thesaurus from the head of our English department – a thesaurus that served me well for several decades. Thank you Mrs. Harper!

My higher education does include a bachelor's degree in communications from a Big Ten university where I also took many English classes. My professional career included 25 years in the advertising industry where, sadly, I was not a copywriter, but an account executive. Still, I got to be around clever, creative people producing inspirational copy.

Much of my writing these days consists of texting, work reports and occasional stints with on-line dating where I have been much more successful meeting women via typing than if I were forced to approach them face to face.

That being said, I know there will still be many, many readers out there (probably more qualified than I) who are going to object to what I write, want to explain why a word is so, question my intellect, discredit my observations, etc...

So here are my disclaimers:

American English: Until sarcasm (or better yet, Snarkasm) becomes an official language, I do not speak any languages other than American English...so I make my observations about these words as an English-speaking American, born and raised in the Midwest (north central, Great Lakes region).

Foreign Origins: I completely understand that many of the words we use, words in our English dictionary, have their roots in a foreign language. But I am simply pointing out that they go against the common rules of our language and make it very difficult for many American adults, children and foreigners to spell, pronounce and understand.

Novel Thoughts (I hope) but Not a Novel: Each of my chapters can stand independently...meaning each chapter features a different subject from all the rest. There are a few, however, that are related to the proceeding chapter but you never have to read one chapter to understand the next. My friend Gibby, a twice published author, who's always the smartest guy in the room, says this makes my book a perfect 'bathroom book.' And this makes perfect sense to me, since I pretty much figured my writing would end up in the bathroom one way or another.

Plagiarizing: A large majority of the stuff I've written originates from my bizarre mind. But some of it I'm sure I've read somewhere. I've tried to give credit to those responsible in the areas where I did some research. And I know that all my thoughts, observations, jokes, inventions cannot possibly be original or my thoughts alone...if you've had some of these thoughts, all I can say is...welcome to my lunacy, my friends.

Logical Explanations: I'm sure that almost every single observation I make about words and our English language has a logical explanation if you dig into its roots. I have brought them into question not as a scholar but as a layman, as they appear to a layman. So, in this case, ignorance is surely bliss. I have found that doing research on all these words and phrases usually leads to logical answers. But logic is very rarely amusing. I don't want to be logical...I want to go off half-cocked, trying to tap into the clever side of humorous.

Labor of Love: Although I question the absurdity, inconsistency or difficulty of our lexicon, please know that I do so because of my amazement, amusement and challenge with our language. I'm thrilled in everyday life when someone takes the extra effort to use an ideal word to describe what they mean instead of the easy, lazy answer... such as, "Hello, how are you?" "I'm *extraordinary*."

Punctuation, Grammar and Style: This being a book about words and language, I'm sure many of you would expect that everything be up to code as far as these rules go. **But I prefer to write in a more conversational tone, using run-on thoughts connected by ellipses (...).** I really don't care if sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a period as long as the thought is conveyed accurately. I have tried to spell and punctuate everything correctly but I'm sure I've made numerous errors. I have alphabetized most of the word lists except for those in which I wanted the strongest examples to appear first.

Explanation Overkill: Nothing is worse than not getting the intended

point or joke. So I have tried to offer an explanation or definition for my words and thoughts where I think it's necessary. Plus, I've often used many of the feature words in a sentence for further clarification. For some, this will be obvious and redundant but I don't want to alienate or leave any reader behind.

Repeating George: Yes, I am a huge fan of George Carlin but no, I am not familiar with every single bit of his material: his books, CD's, live performances, etc. It is quite possible, no, very probable that some of my observations may be spawned by him or have come very close to his actual thoughts. This is not intentional. People tend to remember and repeat that which is most meaningful and agreeable to us...and I'm certainly no different.

Humorous Intentions: I am not trying to make a serious point, a political statement or refute our English language...just trying to make some sense of it and have some laughs. Most importantly, I'm trying to keep myself from going crazy with all this shite careening around in my cranium.

Profanity and Off-Color Material: This most certainly would not be an accurate tribute to Mr. Carlin without some controversial, perhaps distasteful observations. And, like many others, I find these "blue" areas to be rich with provocative, humorous material. I've tried to keep the dirty material out of the front portion of this exercise and compiled it at the very back of the book, in a section that's preceded by a bold warning.

IMAO (In My Arrogant Opinion): These thoughts and observations are my viewpoint, my opinion, from my bizarre perspective. They are certainly not necessarily correct, perhaps not popular and definitely not thorough. I know there are many more examples and other word categories to explore but I can only go through the dictionary and thesaurus so many times. I've tried to keep my lists to no more than 25 words, names or phrases. I had to stop somewhere, and

who knows, maybe leave room for a sequel, maybe entitled, “Son of Lexicon: American Style”

Lastly, and most importantly, my thoughts and opinions are not meant to hurt, persuade or anger anyone...read on, open your mind and have fun with the words, names and phrases in this book.

### That Being Said...

My foremost wish for this exercise/exorcism is to provoke a smile, a laugh or some stimulating thought. If what follows is not appealing, logical or bores you, please just walk away...or destroy this book if you must in order to cleanse your literary palate. I realize that words are not everybody’s bag (old slang term) and the way that I see and interpret them won’t resonate with some of you.

### Categorically speaking...

I’ve divided this book into seven categories and 27 chapters (as stated earlier, each of these chapters is independent of all the others). So, I suggest that if you don’t find value, understanding or entertainment in one chapter, then try another one. Not only will the subject matter be different, but the way my thoughts and observations are expressed may be more meaningful to you. These categories are:

1. Existing Words
2. New Words and Combo-Words
3. Phrases, Prefixes, Suffixes and Contractions
4. Names
5. Miscellaneous Lists
6. Random Ramblings
7. Down to The Nitty-Gritty (and Shitty)

Running throughout these seven categories are 26 chapters. I picked 26 because there are 26 letters in our alphabet and it seemed a fitting match to the amount of material I’d produced.

Oh, and there's one additional 'double letter' chapter... 'XX' ...that indicates my profanity chapter... I didn't go 'XXX' because it's not THAT dirty... Ha! (maybe the next book) These chapters are:

- A. 25-Cent Words
- B. Words That Are Hard to Pronounce and/or Spell
- C. Words That Are Fun to Say or Sound Silly
- D. Words That Go Against the English Rules of Spelling
- E. Words That Sound Like Their Meaning
- F. Words Whose Sound Doesn't Match Their Meanings
- G. Homonyms and Words With Confusing Dual-Purpose
- H. Rhyming Words That Mean the Opposite
- I. Words That Contain Related Words Within Them
- J. Words From a Bygone Era
- K. Fresh Words (That Replaced Outdated Words)
- L. Words That Have Evolved Over Time to Mean Something Completely Different
- M. Words That Are Fun to Say But Bad to Hear From Your Doctor
- N. Splendid Existing Words That We Tend Not to Use
- O. New Words / Combo-Words That Should Exist
- P. Combo-Words That Do Exist
- Q. Phrases of Interest
- R. Words That Always Have a Prefix
- S. Suffixes That Are Now Required in Our Politically Correct World
- T. Contractions That Should Be
- U. Get Beat-Up on the Playground Names
- V. Unisex Names
- W. Names That Are Also Verbs and Adverbs
- X. Existing Team Names
- Y. Future Team Names
- Z. Musical Band Names
- XX. My Favorite Profanity

Just as George Carlin did for me, my ultimate wish is to inspire

someone who reads this book to improve their use of our English language...to make conversation and communicating more colorful and interesting. Also, to resurrect some of these truly wonderful words that are slipping out of our daily use, only to be replaced by crude slang terms, acronyms and lazy, overused, "nothing" words.