

# The Word of the Week\*

February 4, 2006

## Quick Guide

**key words:** e-mail, review, idioms, proverbs, poems, news

**learner English level:** beginner to advanced

**learner maturity level:** from *gimnazjum* up

**preparation time:** initial setup 2 hours; subsequent updates 5-10 minutes each; daily e-mailing about 10 minutes

**materials:** computer with Internet access

Classroom teachers can utilize electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones as tools for English learning by instituting a Word of the Day e-mail list. Such lists exist for native speakers (see Resources), and present recipients with a word, its definition, and some other feature such as a proverb. This small weekly (daily?) investment of time to learn a word or idiom gives recipients a chance to enjoy language and is all the more relevant for non-native speakers of English.

The topical focus of the daily word can shift from the review of classroom vocabulary, to the introduction of slang or thematically based postings. It is helpful to decide on a theme and provide related words for a week or longer. Some thematic topics may include: e.g. "pick" related idioms (such as the various meanings of "pick up" and "pick out"), feelings, weather, food, etc. An even easier thematic approach would be to choose one word a day from a short passage from a poem, song, or from a website. In this case each e-mail starts with a reminder of all the previous words related to that theme. Once all difficult words have appeared

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\*This is a loose adaptation of The Word of the Day idea by John Spiri, of Akita International University, [spiri@aiu.ac.jp](mailto:spiri@aiu.ac.jp)

as a Word of the Week, the entire passage can be provided. An cinema-related series of messages can bring students vital information on film making, preparing them for writing a film review, weeks before they actually tackle the task, and so on.

It is a worthwhile policy to welcome responses with the understanding that the teacher would not necessarily respond to received messages.

## Procedure

**Step 1:** Explain the concept of the Word of the Week and write a sample of what students can expect to receive by e-mail (see appendix for a possible format).

**Step 2:** Pass around a sign up sheet for students to write their email addresses. Explain that mobile phone addresses are fine, but emphasize the fact that a message will be sent on a weekly basis.

**Step 3:** Input all of the e-mail addresses into an e-mail address book, then create one or more groups. As a time saving alternative, ask those interested to send you an email; the sender's information can then be added to your e-mail address book with a click.

**Step 4:** Send a Word of the Day to the group by e-mail.

**Step 5:** Provide in-class quizzes, handouts (like gap exercises), or online pages for students to read and review all the words. I provided an online page so students could easily review and gain an overview of the progression and thematic topics (see Resources).

Although mobiles tend to be the preferred mode of communication for students – and it would be nice to see them put to educational use – they are inferior to computers for a few reasons. First, mobile addresses change frequently; when they do, the sender gets bounced-back messages. Thus, students should be made responsible for informing you of address changes, a sign that they are interested and reading the messages. Second, occasionally the teacher may want to write a longer than usual message (for example, to give a survey); on a mobile, however, long messages may get truncated. Third, sending pictures from a computer to a mobile is not an option. Finally, it could be fun to stay in contact with students while on holiday, but ill-timed messages can be a problem.

One may want to keep list members' addresses anonymous by sending the message to yourself, and using the "bcc" (blind carbon copy) line for the group name. It's good to have a copy of the message sent, and this prevents members from bothering other members with unwanted messages.

## Resources

- [www.phrases.shu.ac.uk/meanings/proverbs.html](http://www.phrases.shu.ac.uk/meanings/proverbs.html) (a good page for sample proverbs)
- [www.globalstories.org/word.htm](http://www.globalstories.org/word.htm) (online Word of the Day archive for John Spiri's students)
- [www.wordsmith.org/lawad/](http://www.wordsmith.org/lawad/) (Word of the Day for native speakers)

## Appendix

A suggested Word of the Day format:

- the word (part of speech)
- definition in English
- translation in Polish, when necessary
- sample sentence
- an idiom or proverb with a brief explanation or rephrasing