

GEN Z WORDS, EXPRESSION, ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

A Categorised Reference Guide for
Workplace, Education & Cultural Literacy

Developed by:

Global Institute for Circular Economy and Sustainable Development Goals (ICE&SDGs)

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Purpose of Creating This Dictionary

Language is a fundamental instrument through which societies communicate values, norms, emotions, and collective identities. However, when language evolves rapidly—particularly through digital platforms, social media, and informal communication channels—it can also become a source of misunderstanding, exclusion, and misinterpretation across generational, cultural, and social boundaries. The purpose of creating this dictionary is to address this challenge by providing a **structured, neutral, and accessible reference** to contemporary language usage, particularly terms commonly associated with Gen Z and emerging generations.

This dictionary has been developed with the primary aim of enabling **public awareness and informed understanding**. It seeks to ensure that individuals across all generations can comprehend modern expressions accurately, thereby reducing the risk of being misled, misinformed, or unintentionally influenced by language that may appear familiar but carries nuanced or context-specific meanings. In an era where communication is increasingly fragmented and accelerated, clarity of language is essential for sound judgement and responsible engagement.

A central objective of this work is to promote **intergenerational understanding**. For elders and older generations, unfamiliar language can sometimes be perceived as dismissive, inappropriate, or disruptive to established norms. Without contextual understanding, this gap can lead to misjudgement or unnecessary tension. By explaining contemporary terms in a neutral and non-judgemental manner, this dictionary supports elders in interpreting language as it is used—rather than as it is assumed—thereby fostering empathy, dialogue, and mutual respect across age groups.

Equally important is the role of this dictionary for **children, adolescents, and young adults**, particularly those who encounter evolving language trends without fully understanding their implications. The widespread use of certain terms does not necessarily imply that they are appropriate in all settings or beneficial in all circumstances. By clearly outlining meanings, tones, and usage contexts, this dictionary enables younger readers to develop **critical language awareness**—helping them distinguish between expressions that may be acceptable, those that require caution, and those that may be unsuitable in professional, educational, or sensitive environments.

This publication does not seek to prescribe language usage or to categorise expressions as inherently “right” or “wrong.” Rather, its purpose is to encourage **informed, conscious, and responsible communication**. Language awareness empowers individuals to make decisions that align with personal values, social responsibility, and situational appropriateness. In this sense, the dictionary functions as a preventive tool—reducing the likelihood of misunderstanding, social conflict, or unintentional harm arising from misinterpreted language.

The development of this dictionary is guided by a broader commitment to **social balance, inclusivity, and positive societal outcomes**. It recognises that language is not merely a mode of expression, but a social force that influences behaviour, relationships, and collective wellbeing. Enhancing language literacy across generations contributes to more respectful interactions, stronger community cohesion, and improved communication within families, workplaces, and public institutions.

Introduction

Language is a living, evolving system that reflects social change, technological advancement, and cultural identity. Across history, shifts in language have mirrored broader transformations in society—how people connect, express emotions, establish norms, and negotiate meaning. In the contemporary era, the pace of linguistic change has accelerated significantly, driven largely by digital communication, social media platforms, and global connectivity. As a result, new words, slang, acronyms, and expressions emerge rapidly, often gaining widespread use before their meanings are fully understood across different generations.

This book has been developed in response to a growing need for clarity, shared understanding, and responsible interpretation of modern language, particularly language associated with Gen Z and emerging generations. While such language often reflects creativity, humour, and evolving social norms, it can also create gaps in understanding between age groups, professional contexts, and cultural settings. Without clear interpretation, these gaps may lead to confusion, miscommunication, or unintended consequences.

The Gen Z dictionary presented in this book is not intended as a prescriptive guide on how language should be used. Rather, it serves as a reference framework—documenting commonly observed terms, their meanings, tones, and contextual usage. By presenting this information in a structured and neutral manner, the book aims to support readers in understanding what is being communicated, rather than reacting based on assumptions or incomplete interpretations.

An important aspect of this introduction is to acknowledge that language does not exist in isolation. Words acquire meaning through context, intent, audience, and environment. A term that may be perceived as harmless in a peer-to-peer digital conversation may be inappropriate or misunderstood in professional, educational, or intergenerational settings. This dictionary therefore emphasises context awareness, encouraging readers to consider not only what a word means, but where, how, and with whom it is used.

For educators, parents, leaders, policymakers, and professionals, this book offers a tool to decode contemporary language trends without judgement or bias. Understanding language is a prerequisite for effective communication, informed decision-making, and inclusive dialogue. For younger readers, the dictionary provides an opportunity to reflect on language choices, recognise implications, and develop greater awareness of how words may be received by others.

This introduction also underscores a critical distinction: understanding language does not equate to endorsing it. The inclusion of any term in this book does not imply approval, encouragement, or recommendation. Instead, it reflects observed usage patterns and seeks to

prevent misunderstanding or misguidance that can arise when language is interpreted incorrectly or taken at face value without context.

As societies become increasingly interconnected yet diverse, the ability to communicate across generational and cultural boundaries becomes ever more important. Language literacy—particularly awareness of evolving language—plays a vital role in fostering empathy, reducing friction, and strengthening social cohesion. This book positions language as a shared social resource that, when understood, can support inclusion rather than division.

Alignment with ICE & SDGs Mission

This initiative aligns with the mission of Global Institute for Circular Economy and Sustainable Development Goals (ICE&SDGs), a think tank dedicated to advancing positive social impact and the creation of balanced societies.

ICE & SDGs operates on the principle that sustainable development is not solely driven by economic or environmental outcomes, but also by social understanding, cultural literacy, and inclusive communication. By addressing generational language gaps and promoting mutual understanding, this dictionary contributes to the broader objectives of social equity, reduced misunderstanding, and strengthened human connection—key foundations for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through initiatives such as this, ICE & SDGs continues to support informed societies where diversity of expression is understood, respected, and navigated responsibly.

The chapters that follow present the Gen Z dictionary in a clear, categorised format. Readers are encouraged to approach the content with curiosity, openness, and critical awareness. Language will continue to evolve, but informed understanding remains essential for navigating change responsibly.

1. Social Media & Internet Language

Digital-first vocabulary shaping online communication

Covers algorithm-driven terms, influencer culture, viral content, engagement metrics and evolving internet behaviours.

Term	Meaning
Algorithm	Platform content-selection logic
Feed	Stream of posts
FYP	For You Page (TikTok)
Ratio	More negative than positive reactions
Cancel	Public withdrawal of support
Soft launch	Quiet reveal
Hard launch	Public announcement
Influencer	Online opinion leader
Content creator	Person producing digital content
Engagement	Likes, comments, shares
Viral	Rapid widespread attention
Meme	Reusable viral humour
POV	Point of View
Thread	Series of connected posts
Lurk	Observe without engaging
Screenshot	Captured post/message
DM	Direct Message

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Term	Meaning
Clickbait	Misleading headline
Shadowban	Reduced visibility
De-influencing	Discouraging product hype

2. Workplace-Used Gen Z Terms

Informal language increasingly used in Teams and Slack

Explains workplace-friendly Gen Z expressions such as hard stop, circle back, soft launch and energy, translated into professional equivalents.

Term	Meaning (Decoded)	Typical Use
Low-key	Subtle, not strongly emphasised	"I'm low-key concerned about the deadline"
High-key	Very obvious or strongly felt	"This is high-key urgent"
Vibe	Mood or atmosphere	"The meeting vibe was positive"
Energy	Attitude or presence	"She brings good energy to the team"
Bet	Agreement / confirmation	"Bet, I'll send it today"
Say less	I understand; no further explanation needed	Acknowledging instructions
Hard stop	Must end at a fixed time	Meeting scheduling
Circle back	Revisit later	Follow-ups
Not it	I don't want to take this on	Light refusal
Real	Genuine / true	Agreement with a point
Based	Confident and authentic	Praise for a strong stance
Dead	Extremely amused (figurative)	Informal humour
Main character	Acting with confidence or ownership	Self-motivation context
Soft launch	Quiet or limited rollout	Change management

3. Humour, Sarcasm & Irony

Expressive language reflecting tone rather than literal meaning

Interprets exaggerations, irony and humour-based expressions commonly seen in digital communication.

Term	Meaning	Tone
I'm crying	Something is very funny	Exaggerated humour
I'm dead	Extremely amused	Hyperbole
That's wild	Surprising or shocking	Light sarcasm
Unhinged	Chaotically funny	Playful
Chaos	Unexpected situation	Humorous framing
Delulu	Delusional thinking (humorous)	Self-aware humour
It's giving...	Suggests a vibe or impression	Irony
Be so for real	Questioning realism	Sarcastic
Touch grass	Step away from screens	Teasing
Free entertainment	Watching drama unfold	Irony
Yikes	Awkward or uncomfortable	Mild criticism
Side-eye	Disapproval	Non-verbal humour

4. Compliments & Insults

(Decoded with neutral explanation — context matters)

Term	Intended Meaning	Neutral Explanation
Slay	Strong performance	Positive compliment
Based	Confident and authentic	Praise
Ate	Did extremely well	Achievement recognition
Iconic	Memorable or impressive	High praise
Main character	Self-assured	Positive framing
Mid	Average	Mild negative
Cringe	Embarrassing	Social discomfort
NPC	Unoriginal behaviour	Passive criticism
Delulu	Unrealistic thinking	Light mockery
Try-hard	Over-effort perceived	Negative judgement
Pick-me	Seeking validation	Social criticism
Corny	Overly sentimental	Mild insult
Red flag	Warning sign	Behavioural concern
Ick	Sudden dislike	Emotional reaction

5. Relationships, Social Life & Cultural Context

Terms reflecting modern relationships and social dynamics. This section defines expressions and relations.

Term	Meaning	Usage Context
Situationship	Undefined romantic relationship	Dating
Ghosting	Cutting off communication without explanation	Social / dating
Soft launch	Quietly revealing a relationship	Social media
Hard launch	Public relationship announcement	Social media
Red flag	Behavioural warning sign	Relationship evaluation
Green flag	Positive behaviour indicator	Opposite of red flag
Ick	Sudden loss of attraction	Emotional response
Rizz	Romantic charm	Attraction
Love bomb	Excessive early affection	Relationship caution
Breadcrumbing	Inconsistent interest	Dating behaviour
Talking stage	Pre-relationship phase	Modern dating
Sneaky link	Secret romantic involvement	Informal
FWB	Friends With Benefits	Casual relationship
Orbiting	Watching but not engaging	Post-breakup behaviour
Generation Builder	House wife	Relationship
Equal Partner	Wife / Married Partner	Relationship
Child Equalism	Son & Daughter	Gender-equal, No bias, Equal-value kids

6. Gen Z vs Gen Alpha Crossover Terms

(Used by both late Gen Z and early Gen Alpha)

Term	Meaning	Notes
NPC	Passive or scripted behaviour	Originates from gaming
Rizz	Charisma or charm	Often social/dating context
Sus	Suspicious or questionable	Shortened from “suspicious”
Cap	Lie or false statement	“That’s cap”
No cap	Truth / honesty	“No cap, this works”
Slay	Doing something very well	Compliment
Bussin	Extremely good	Often used for food
Mid	Average or mediocre	Mild criticism
POV	Point of View	Social media storytelling
W / L	Win / Loss	Success vs failure
Glow up	Significant improvement	Personal development
Core memory	Memorable experience	Emotional emphasis
Ratio	More negative than positive reactions	Social media metric

7. Emotional Reaction or Expressions

Term	Meaning
Cringe	Second-hand embarrassment
Mood	Strong emotional relatability
I'm dead	Extremely amused (figurative)
I'm crying	Something is very funny
Yikes	Discomfort or concern
Oof	Pain, sympathy, or awkwardness
Triggered	Emotionally affected
Over it	Frustrated or disengaged
That's wild	Surprising or shocking
Unhinged	Chaotically funny
Chaos	Unexpected situation
Side-eye	Disapproval
Big yikes	Strong discomfort
It's giving...	Suggesting a vibe or impression
Be so for real	Questioning realism
Touch grass	Step away from screens
Free entertainment	Observing drama
Core memory	Emotionally significant moment
That ain't it	Disagreement
Felt	Emotional resonance

8. Everyday Gen Z Slang

Common informal expressions used in daily conversation

This section explains widely used Gen Z slang terms such as vibe, lowkey, slay, mid, and bussin, decoded in neutral and professional language for clarity and understanding.

Term	Meaning
Bet	Agreement / confirmation
Vibe	Mood or atmosphere
Vibing	Feeling relaxed or positive
Low-key	Subtle, mild, understated
High-key	Very obvious or intense
Delulu	Unrealistic thinking (humorous)
Slay	Doing something exceptionally well
Bussin	Extremely good (often food)
Mid	Average, not impressive
Based	Confident, authentic opinion
Real	Genuine / truthful
Say less	I understand; no more explanation needed
Not it	I don't want to do this
Main character	Acting confidently or with ownership
Glow up	Noticeable improvement
Hits different	Feels unique or special
Out of pocket	Inappropriate or unexpected
Down bad	Struggling emotionally

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Term	Meaning
Extra	Over-the-top behaviour
Valid	Acceptable / understandable
Wild	Shocking or surprising

9. Acronyms & Abbreviations

Frequently used short forms across chat, social media and work

Includes commonly used acronyms such as FOMO, IYKYK, TL;DR, IRL and others, explaining both literal meaning and contextual usage.

Acronym	Full Form	Meaning
FOMO	Fear Of Missing Out	Anxiety about exclusion
JOMO	Joy Of Missing Out	Enjoying not participating
IYKYK	If You Know You Know	Insider understanding
TL;DR	Too Long; Didn't Read	Summary cue
IMO / IMHO	In My Opinion / Honest Opinion	Personal view
IRL	In Real Life	Offline life
IDK	I Don't Know	Uncertainty
IDC	I Don't Care	Indifference
TBH	To Be Honest	Honesty disclaimer
NGL	Not Gonna Lie	Honest admission
SMH	Shaking My Head	Disapproval
BRB	Be Right Back	Temporary absence
AFK	Away From Keyboard	Not present
FWIW	For What It's Worth	Added context
OOF	Expression of discomfort	Reaction
ETA	Edited To Add	Post update
RN	Right Now	Current moment
BTW	By The Way	Side note

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Acronym	Full Form	Meaning
TMI	Too Much Information	Oversharing

Closing Note

Language reflects culture, identity and change. This book aims to bridge generational understanding by decoding Gen Z language in a respectful, neutral and practical way. As language continues to evolve, curiosity and openness remain the most effective tools for connection.

For more details about our social impact and CSR activities, visit us on URL: www.ce-sdg.org > CSR.