

Newspeak

This article is about the fictional language. For the programming language, see [Newspeak \(programming language\)](#). For politically correct speech, see [Political correctness](#).

Newspeak is the fictional language in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, written by George Orwell. It is a controlled language created by the totalitarian state Oceania as a tool to limit freedom of thought, and concepts that pose a threat to the regime such as freedom, self-expression, individuality, and peace. Any form of thought alternative to the party's construct is classified as "thoughtcrime".

Newspeak is explained in chapters 4 and 5 of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and in an appendix to the book. The language follows, for the most part, the same grammatical rules as English, but has a much more limiting, and constantly shifting vocabulary. Any synonyms or antonyms, along with undesirable concepts are eradicated. The goal is for everyone except the Proles — the working-class citizens of Oceania — to be speaking this language by the year 2050. In the meantime, Oldspeak (current English) is still in common usage with Newspeak interspersed into conversation.

Orwell was inspired to invent Newspeak by the constructed language Basic English, which he promoted from 1942 to 1944 before emphatically rejecting it in his essay "Politics and the English Language."^[1] In this paper he deplores the bad English of his day, citing dying metaphors, pretentious diction or rhetoric, and meaningless words, which he saw as encouraging unclear thought and reasoning. Towards the end of the essay, Orwell states: "I said earlier that the decadence of our language is probably curable. Those who deny this would argue, if they produced an argument at all, that language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkering with words or constructions."

Newspeak's contracted forms, such as *Ingsoc* and *Ministue*, are inspired by the Russian syllabic abbreviations used for concepts relating to the government and society of the USSR, such as *politburo*, *Comintern*, *kolkhoz* ("collective farm") and *Komsomol* ("Young Communists' League"), many of which found their way into the speech of Communists in other countries.

1 Basic principles

1.1 To remove synonyms and antonyms

The aim of Newspeak is to remove all shades of meaning from language, leaving simple concepts (pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness, goodthink and crimethink) that reinforce the total dominance of the State. Newspeak root words serve as both nouns and verbs, further reducing the total number of words; for example, "think" is both a noun and verb, so the word *thought* is not required and can be abolished. The party also intends that Newspeak be spoken in *staccato* rhythms with syllables that are easy to pronounce. This will make speech more automatic and unconscious and reduce the likelihood of thought. (See *duckspeak*.)

In addition, words with negative meanings are removed as redundant, so "bad" becomes "ungood". Words with comparative and superlative meanings are also simplified, so "better" becomes "gooder", and "best" becomes "goodest". Intensifiers can be added, so "great" becomes "plusgood", and "excellent" or "splendid" becomes "doubleplusgood". This ambiguity between comparative/superlative forms and intensified forms is one of the few examples of ambiguity in Newspeak.

Adjectives are formed by adding the suffix "-ful" to a root word (e.g., "goodthinkful" – orthodox in thought), and adverbs by adding "-wise" ("goodthinkwise" – in an orthodox manner).

This would, of course, not prevent heretical statements such as "Big Brother is ungood," but not only would this statement sound absurd in the ears of the politically orthodox, it would also be impossible to elaborate on or specify exactly what the statement means since all concepts and words that can be used to argue against Big Brother (i.e. liberty, rights, freedom, etc.) would be eradicated from the language. The statement would thus be meaningless.

1.2 To control thought

According to Orwell, "the purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of IngSoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. Its vocabulary was so constructed as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meaning and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. This was done partly by the invention of new words, but chiefly by eliminating unde-

sirable words and stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meaning whatever.”^[2] The idea that language influences worldview is **linguistic relativity**.

For example, the word “free” still existed in Newspeak but could only be used in terms of something not being possessed, as in “the dog is free from lice,” or “this field is free from weeds.” It could not be used in terms of being able to do as one pleases, as in “free choice” or “**free will**” since these concepts no longer existed. Newspeak was designed not to extend but to diminish the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum. Any redundancies in the English language were removed.^[2]

As Orwell further states (through the character of Syme, who is discussing his work on the latest edition of the Newspeak dictionary), “By 2050—earlier, probably—all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. The whole literature of the past will have been destroyed. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron—they’ll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually contradictory of what they used to be. Even the literature of the Party will change. Even the slogans will change. How could you have a slogan like “freedom is slavery” when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.”^[1]

Some examples of Newspeak from the novel include **crimethink**, **doublethink**, and **Ingsoc**. They mean, respectively, “thought-crime”, “accepting as correct two mutually contradictory beliefs”, and “English socialism”—the official party philosophy. The word *Newspeak* itself also comes from the language.

Generically, *Newspeak* has come to mean any attempt to restrict disapproved language by a government or other powerful entity.^[3]

2 Vocabulary

See also: **List of Newspeak words**

In Orwell’s novel, Newspeak attempts to influence thought by consolidating — i.e., decreasing — the expressiveness of the English language. In keeping with these principles, the following words serve as both nouns and verbs. Thus, **crimethink** is both the noun meaning “thoughtcrime” and the verb meaning “to commit thoughtcrime.” To form an adjective, one adds the suffix “-ful” (e.g., **crimethinkful**) and to form an adverb, “-wise” (e.g., **crimethinkwise**).

There are some irregular forms, like the adjectival forms of **Minitrue**, **Minipax**, **Miniplenty**, and **Miniluv** (Ministry

of Truth, Ministry of Peace, Ministry of Plenty, and Ministry of Love, respectively — all ministries of the active government in 1984). To say that something or someone is the best, Newspeak uses **doubleplusgood**, while the worst would be **doubleplusungood** (e.g., “Big Brother is **doubleplusgood**, Emmanuel Goldstein is **doubleplusungood**”).

2.1 “Bellyfeel”

The word **bellyfeel** refers to a blind, enthusiastic acceptance of an idea.

“Consider, for example, such a typical sentence from a *Times* leading article as *Oldthinkers unbellyfeel Ingsoc*. The shortest rendering one could make of this in Oldspeak would be: ‘Those whose ideas were formed before the Revolution cannot have a full emotional understanding of the principles of English Socialism.’ But this is not an adequate translation. [...] [O]nly a person thoroughly grounded in Ingsoc could appreciate the full force of the word *bellyfeel*, which implied a blind, enthusiastic and casual acceptance difficult to imagine today.” - Orwell’s 1984 appendix^[4]

2.2 “Blackwhite”

Blackwhite has “two mutually contradictory meanings” depending on whether it is applied to an opponent — “impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the plain facts” — or to a Party member — “a loyal willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands”.

However, it is also an example of **doublethink**, because it represents an active rewriting of the past, which is a key aspect of the Party’s control. Indeed, **blackwhite** is explained as “the ability to believe that black is white, and more, to know that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary”.

This blind faith can stem from respect for authority, fear, indoctrination, critical laziness, or gullibility. Orwell’s **blackwhite** refers only to that caused by fear, indoctrination, or repression of critical thinking, rather than that caused by laziness or gullibility. A true Party member could automatically and without thought expunge any “incorrect” information and neatly replace it with “true” information. Done properly, there would be no recollection of the “incorrect” information.

2.3 “Crimethink”

Crimethink is the Newspeak word for **thoughtcrime** (thoughts that are unorthodox or outside the official government platform), as well as the verb meaning “to commit thoughtcrime”. **Goodthink**, which is approved by the Party, is the opposite of **crimethink**. **Winston Smith**, the

main character, writes in his diary, “Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death.”

2.4 “Duckspeak”

Duckspeak is a Newspeak term that means “to quack like a duck” (literal meaning) or “to speak without thinking”. Duckspeak can be good or “ungood” (bad) depending on who is speaking, and whether what they are saying aligns with Big Brother’s ideals. To speak rubbish and lies may be “ungood”, but to do so for the good of The Party may be good. Orwell explains in the appendix: “Ultimately it was hoped to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centres at all. This aim was frankly admitted in the Newspeak word duckspeak [...]. Like various words in the B vocabulary, duckspeak was ambivalent in meaning. Provided that the opinions which were quacked out were orthodox ones, it implied nothing but praise, and when the Times referred to one of the orators of the Party as a doubleplusgood duckspeaker it was paying a warm and valued compliment.”

An example of duckspeak in action is provided in chapter 9, when an Inner Party speaker is haranguing the crowd about the crimes of Eurasia when a note is passed into his hand. He never stops speaking or changes his inflection, but (according to the changed Party position) he now condemns the crimes of Eastasia, which is Oceania’s new enemy.

2.5 “Goodsex” and “sexcrime”

Goodsex is any form of sex considered acceptable by the Party. Specifically, this refers only to married heterosexual sex for the exclusive purpose of procreation, and with no physical pleasure on the part of the woman. All other forms of sex are considered sexcrime.

2.6 “Ownlife”

Ownlife refers to the tendency to enjoy being solitary or individualistic, which is considered subversive. Winston Smith comments that even to go for a walk by oneself can be regarded as suspicious.

2.7 “Unperson”

An unperson is someone who has been “vaporized” — not only killed by the state, but **erased from existence**. Such a person would be written out of existing books, photographs and articles so that no trace of their existence could be found in the historical record. The idea is that such a person would, according to the principles of doublethink, be forgotten completely (for it would be impossible to provide evidence of their existence), even by close friends and family.

Mentioning an unperson’s name, or even speaking of their past existence, is itself thoughtcrime; the concept that the person may have existed at one time and has disappeared cannot be expressed in Newspeak.

3 Grammar

3.1 Prefixes

“Un-” is a Newspeak **prefix** used for negation. It is used as a prefix to make the word negative, since there are no **antonyms** in Newspeak. For example, warm becomes “uncold”. It is often decided to keep the word with a more unpleasant nuance to it when diminishing vocabulary. Therefore, cold is preferred to unwarm or unhot, and dark is preferred to unlight.^[2] The Party’s choice for the less pleasant versions of an antonym may be interpreted as a way of rendering its subjects depressive and pessimistic, as well as to limit and suppress unorthodox thought.

On the other hand, the Party also controls one’s ability to think negatively by sometimes allowing only the positive term preceded by the prefix “un-”. For example, the concept of “bad” can be expressed only with ungood. When placed before a verb, “un-” becomes a negative **imperative**; for example, unproceed means “do not proceed”.

- “Plus-” is an **intensifier**, in place of “more” or the suffix “-er”; great or better becomes “plusgood”.
- “Doubleplus-” further intensifies “plus-”; excellent or best becomes “doubleplusgood”.

3.2 Suffixes

- “-ful” is a Newspeak **suffix** that turns another word into an adjective (e.g., “speedful” instead of rapid).
- “-ed” is the only method of making a non-**auxiliary verb** past tense in the A-vocabulary. This decreases the number of words required to express tenses by removing irregular conjugations. Ran becomes runned, drank becomes drinkened, etc.
- “-wise” is a Newspeak suffix used to turn another word into an adverb; for example, quickly would be speedwise. Therefore, “He ran very quickly” would become “He runned plus-speedwise.”

3.3 Further vocabulary

(Some of these are only part of the “abbreviated jargon — not actually Newspeak, but consisting largely of Newspeak words — which was used in the Ministry for internal purposes” described by Orwell in chapter 4.)

- **Artsem:** Artificial insemination.
- **BB:** Big Brother.
- **Crimestop:** To rid oneself of unwanted thoughts—i.e., thoughts that interfere with Party ideology—in order to avoid committing thoughtcrime.
- **Dayorder:** Order of the day.
- **Equal:** Only used to describe physical equality such as height and weight. It does not refer to social, political or economical equality because there is no such concept as social inequality in purportedly egalitarian Ingsoc.
- **Facecrime:** An indication that a person is guilty of thoughtcrime based on facial expression.
- **Free:** Meaning negative freedom (without), in a physical sense. Only used in statements such as “This dog is free from lice”, as the concepts of “political freedom” and “intellectual freedom” do not exist in Newspeak.
- **Goodthink:** Orthodox thought.
- **Ingsoc:** English Socialism.
- **Issue:** Children produced by goodsex.
- **Joycamp:** Forced labor camp.
- **Malquoted:** Flawed representations of the Party or Big Brother by the press.
- **Miniluv:** “Ministry of Love” (secret police, interrogation, and torture).
- **Minipax:** “Ministry of Peace” (Ministry of War, cf.: “Department of Defense”, “War Department”).
- **Minitrue:** “Ministry of Truth” (propaganda and alteration of history, culture, and entertainment).
- **Miniplenty:** “Ministry of Plenty” (keeping the population in a state of constant economic hardship).
- **Oldspeak:** English; any language that is not Newspeak.
- **Oldthink:** Ideas inspired by events or memories of times prior to the Revolution.
- **Pornosec:** Sub-unit of the Fiction Department of the Ministry of Truth that produces pornography for proles.
- **Prolefeed:** The steady stream of mindless entertainment produced to distract and occupy the masses. The prole in prolefeed is reference to the Marxist concept of the proletariat.
- **Recdep:** “Records Department” (division of the Ministry of Truth that deals with the rectification of records; department in which Winston works).
- **Rectify:** Ministry of Truth euphemism for deliberately altering the past.
- **Speakwrite:** An instrument used by Party members to note or “write” down information by speaking into an apparatus as a faster alternative to an “ink pencil”. Speakwrites are used extensively in the Ministry of Truth by both Winston Smith and others in their daily work.
- **Telescreen:** Television and security camera devices used by the ruling Party in Oceania to keep its subjects under constant surveillance.
- **Thinkpol:** Thought Police.
- **Upsub:** Submit to higher authority. In one scene, Winston Smith is instructed to alter a document to conform with the Party line and submit it to his superiors before filing it: (“rewrite fullwise upsub ante-filing”; note that this sentence is an example of the Newspeak-influenced bureaucratic jargon rather than official Newspeak).

3.4 A, B, and C vocabulary

The “A” group of words deals with simple concepts needed in everyday life (such as eating, drinking, working, cooking, etc.). It is almost entirely made of words that already exist in the English language.

The “B” group of words is deliberately constructed to convey more complicated ideas. The words in this group are compound words with political implications and aim to impose the mental attitude of the Party upon the speaker. For example, the Newspeak word “goodthink” roughly means “orthodoxy”. The B words were in all cases compound words. They consisted of two or more words, or portions of words, welded together in an easily pronounceable form. The resulting amalgam was always a noun-verb and inflected according to the ordinary rules.

The “C” group of words deals with technical vocabulary and is supplementary to the other two groups. Since the Party does not want its people to have knowledge of more than one subject, there is no Newspeak word for “science”; there are separate words for different fields.

4 Ramifications

The advantages of Newspeak are its means of preserving the secrets of the Party, preventing politically motivated actions, and promoting the use of politically correct terms. Its disadvantages include the Party using censorship and glamorization of themselves, compromised freedom of speech, and the prevention of the flow of ideas for the citizens of Oceania, who are controlled by this reduction in their language.^[5]

Words created to soften the blow of something **taboo** quickly absorb any negative connotations they were meant to avoid in the first place. **Steven Pinker**, a **Harvard University** linguist, calls this the “euphemism treadmill”, also known as pejoration. By creating such euphemisms, Newspeak only creates a new generation of derogatory terms. As Pinker argues in “The Game of the Name”, the euphemism treadmill signifies that “concepts, not words, are in charge: give a concept a new name, and the name becomes colored by the concept; the concept does not become freshened by the name”.^[6]

In expressing their opinions and concerns, the Party exercises the same rights librarians seek to protect when they confront censorship. In making their criticisms known, characters such as **Winston** and **Julia** who object to certain ideas are exercising the same rights as those who created and disseminated the material to which they object. Their rights to voice opinions and efforts to persuade others to adopt those opinions is protected only if the rights of persons to express ideas they despise are also protected.^[7]

Limiting language limits more than just words—it limits thought. Without the means to express thoughts beyond “I feel good or ungood”, people lack the means to commit a thought crime. Even if it were committed, it is unlikely that people would understand enough to take action. Free speech diminishes as the dictionary slims down with each new edition. There is not much difference between this action and reducing the population that could actually read the word “dictionary” if the book were placed in front of them. Without the ability to read or write, one is unaware of the concept of “free speech” and unable to know how to prevent its erosion.

5 See also

- $2 + 2 = 5$
- Code word
- Dumbing down
- Framing
- Language and thought
- List of Newspeak words
- Loaded language
- Distancing language
- Logocracy
- New Soviet man
- Philosophy of Language
- Political correctness

- Sapir–Whorf hypothesis
- Thought-terminating cliché
- Soviet phraseology
- Thought reform in the People’s Republic of China
- Hate Speech

Authoritarian regimes:

- General line of the party
- *LTI - Lingua Tertii Imperii (The Language of the Third Reich)*
- Self-criticism

Fiction:

- Ascian language
- Nadsat

6 References

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7 Further reading

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- The Principles of Newspeak
- George Orwell's 1984
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