

Swearing

Swearing is the act of using words or expressions judged taboo by society. Using taboo words or expressions is referred to as swearing, cursing, cussing, vulgarity, and blasphemy. The words and expressions themselves are called profanities; expletives; obscenities; and dirty, four-letter, coarse, crude, foul, raunchy, or off-color words.

Swearing is aggressive. And for that reason, men tend to use it more than do women. Swearing is the language of choice in many male-dominated settings, like construction sites and locker rooms. It fits well in rough-and-tumble settings and in the swagger culture of some young men, where it's important that they show off their budding manly abilities.

Harvard psychologist, Steven Pinker, believes people swear in five different ways.

HOW WE SWEAR	WHEN WE SWEAR	WHAT WE SAY
Cathartically	Sudden pain, frustration, or regret	Sh*t!
Abusively	Anger or aggressiveness	Eat sh*t!
Emphatically	Excitement or surprise	Holly sh*t!
Descriptively	Anger or the desire to be blatantly vivid	You look like sh*t!
Idiomatically	As a normal expression during conversation	What a pile of sh*t.

What is it about one word that makes it taboo when compared to a second word with the same meaning? Pinker believes it's because taboo words bring to mind the most vivid and disagreeable aspects of the subject at hand, rather than just pointing to it in a more neutral less offensive way. *Sh*t*, for example, conjures up a far more unpleasant picture in our minds than does *feces*.

But that's not the only reason according to Pinker. What gives taboo words their punch is their taboo status. The more forbidden a word or phrase is, the more shocking when you use it. People treat words as taboo to the extent that everyone else treats them as taboo. So the next time you feel the urge to swear, remember the old proverb: *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*. You don't want to be the only one in the conversation who is swearing.

For every profane word or phrase you know, there's another that means the same and is less taboo. Sh*t has an amazing number of synonyms, each with its own unique use, some considered more or less profane depending on where you are, with whom you're talking, and the subject about which you're talking. Consider this.

Taboo: *sh*t*

Harsh: *crap*

Less Offensive: *waste, fecal matter, muck*

Formal: *feces, excrement, defecation*

Children: *poop, poo, poo-poo, doo-doo, doody, Number 2, BM*

Medical: *stool, bowel movement*

Technical (engineering): *turd*

Large animals: *pies, chips*

Small animals: *droppings*

Scientific (animals): *scat, dung*

Agricultural (animals): *manure, guano*

People judge you by the language you use. And for good reason, your words reflect your character and intentions. Here are some dos and don'ts to consider.

Swearing Dos and Don'ts

- Know when and where profanity is accepted—even expected.
- Learn the words and how to use them. *Holy large cow pie* just doesn't have the right ring to it.
- Don't use profanity too often. The words will lose their punch. And it will lead people to believe that you're intellectually lazy being unable to express yourself any other way.

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