



# 101 Occasional Words

selected and misused  
by Peter Fyfe

*"Even superheroes need good vocabularies!"*

## An Occasional Word...

# Felicitations!

*noun*

*happy greetings*

He started his chrestomathy of occasional words, not with a prolegomenon, but with felicitations, in the hope that the words, whether obscure, jocular, archaic, or just neglected, would bring not only a much needed vocabulary expanding opportunity, but also a little happiness and joy into the lives of the differently eloquent.

*December, 2004*

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

**prolix**

*adjective*

*lengthy and tedious*

He could hardly contain his excitement at the thought of another prolix conversation on the subject of his colleague's forthcoming renovations.

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## An Occasional Word...

# quidnunc

*noun*

*a person given to gossip*

His proudest moment was the first time he was accused of being a quidnunc.

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# An Occasional Word...

## obloquy

*noun*

*the state of being ill spoken*

He could endure many things but obloquy was not among them.

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## An Occasional Word...

# symposium

*noun*

*a drinking party*

He told his mother he couldn't come to dinner because he had an important symposium to attend.

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## An Occasional Word...

# onychophagia

*noun*

*nail biting*

He encouraging her, in the interest of better deportment, to eschew onychophagia.

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## An Occasional Word...

# ataraxia

*noun*

*calmness, tranquillity, imperturbability*

He looked forward to his sabbatical and the opportunity to reside, day to day, in ataraxia.

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## An Occasional Word...

# tergiversation

*noun*

*making conflicting and evasive statements*

The man's ongoing tergiversation was beginning to abrade his good humour.

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## An Occasional Word...

# pogonotomy

*noun*

*trimming one's beard*

His elaborate facial shrubbery required a significant investment in pogonotomy.

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## An Occasional Word...

# alliaceous

*adjective*

*smelling of onions or garlic*

Anyone not at least a little alliaceous doesn't know how to eat properly.

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# An Occasional Word...

## temerarious

*adjective*

*reckless and rash*

He was getting too old for this temerarious behaviour.

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## An Occasional Word...

# hierophant

*noun*

*an interpreter of the esoteric*

Sometimes his tendency to fancy himself as a hierophant could get a little wearing.

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# An Occasional Word...

**ternate**

*adjective*

*arranged in threes*

The barman set up his favourite: ternate gins.

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# An Occasional Word...

## inchoate

*adjective*

*just begun*

He marvelled at the potential of his still inchoate vocabulary.

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## An Occasional Word...

# asperity

*noun*

*harshness of temper*

He tended to display a certain asperity in the earlier hours of the day.

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## An Occasional Word...

# **haptic**

*adjective*

*of or pertaining to touch, tactile*

He sensed at once her highly haptic nature.

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## An Occasional Word...

**titivate**

*verb*

*put the finishing touches on*

She paused before the mirror to titivate her hair, makeup, and décolletage.

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## An Occasional Word...

# plumassier

*noun*

*a person who trades or works in feathers*

No truly great outfit is complete without a visit to one's plumassier.

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# An Occasional Word...

## edentate

*noun*

*having few or no teeth*

Once again the bus was replete with the edentate.

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## An Occasional Word...

# fustian

*adjective*

*turgid speech or writing*

He rejoiced ironically as we waded through another fustian memorandum from his peer.

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## An Occasional Word...

# dysgraphia

*noun*

*an inability to write coherently*

Was he the only one immune to the plague of dysgraphia sweeping society?

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## An Occasional Word...

# horripilation

*noun*

*goose bumps*

The sudden outbreak of horripilation alerted him to her arrival.

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## An Occasional Word...

# demulcent

*adj*

*soothing*

He rubbed a little demulcent balm into his tired old face.

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## An Occasional Word...

# chrestomathy

*noun*

*passages used to help learn language*

He could say without fear of contradiction that his work was unlikely to be used as chrestomathy.

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## An Occasional Word...

# anosmia

*noun*

*the loss of the sense of smell*

Given his neighbour's unique personal hygiene regime, he longed to suffer from anosmia.

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## An Occasional Word...

# strafe

*noun*

*abuse*

He always found he responded very positively to a barrage of strafe.

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# An Occasional Word...

**ersatz**

*adjective*

*an inferior substitute*

His nibbled politely at the meagre serving of ersatz wit before him and dreamt quietly of better times, better company, and better conversation.

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## An Occasional Word...

# gallimaufry

*noun*

*a jumble or medley*

Was there any way to bring order to the  
gallimaufry that was his mind?

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## An Occasional Word...

# sprezzatura

*noun*

*the art of making the difficult appear effortless*

He whipped off a few more quips with his customary sprezzatura.

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## An Occasional Word...

# serpiginous

*adjective*

*like a serpent, winding*

After one last refreshing ale, he began the serpiginous journey home.

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## An Occasional Word...

**timorous**

*adjective*

*easily alarmed*

Conversation with him was no task for the timorous.

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## An Occasional Word...

# behemoth

*noun*

*an enormous thing*

He sat down to consider the behemoth his once simple life had become and wondered if he'd been taking himself too seriously.

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## An Occasional Word...

# bruxism

*noun*

*the involuntary grinding of the teeth*

He feared the ongoing frustration of his situation would cause his bruxism to become chronic.

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## An Occasional Word...

**osculate**

*verb (jocular)*

*kiss*

The happy couple paused only to osculate.

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## An Occasional Word...

# oscitation

*noun*

*yawning, inattention*

His oration caused an outbreak of oscitation.

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## An Occasional Word...

# splenetic

*adjective*

*Ill tempered*

Try as he might, he could not completely conceal his splenetic true self.

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## An Occasional Word...

# occiput

*noun*

*the back of the head*

He needed a smack to the occiput.

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## An Occasional Word...

**anodyne**

*adjective*

*soothing*

He always tried to adopt an anodyne tone when engaging in rigorous debate.

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# An Occasional Word...

## solidus

*noun*

*forward slash character*

Why use a slash when you can choose a solidus?

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# An Occasional Word...

## otiose

*noun*

*having no practical purpose*

He managed to struggle along with his career in business, despite not having an otiose business degree.

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## An Occasional Word...

# grimoire

*noun*

*a book of magical knowledge*

Sometimes he wondered whether he should be writing a procedure manual or a grimoire.

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# An Occasional Word...

## avuncular

*adjective*

*in the manner of an uncle*

We knew his nephew had arrived by the avuncular aura he now bore.

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## An Occasional Word...

**persiflage**

*noun*

*banter*

He wondered if there was anything more enjoyable than a spot of persiflage.

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## An Occasional Word...

# penurious

*adjective*

*stingy or grudging*

His penurious grasp on his wallet prevented his lashing out on a decent haircut.

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# An Occasional Word...

## mendicant

*noun*

*beggar*

Penurious as he was, he declined the offer to fund the mendicant's next meal

.

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## An Occasional Word...

# valetudinarian

*adjective*

*unduly anxious about one's health*

Her constant attempts to ply him with herbal remedies did little to assuage his tendency toward the valetudinarian.

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## An Occasional Word...

# schadenfreude

*noun*

*the enjoyment of the misfortune of others*

She implored him to include regular doses of schadenfreude in his mental health regime.

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## An Occasional Word...

# loquacious

*adjective*

*talkative*

There is the special camaraderie enjoyed by the loquacious to which the sullen will never be privy.

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## An Occasional Word...

# subfusc

*adjective*

*dull, dusky, gloomy*

He knew in his heart he would never embrace the subfusc world that is mundane reality.

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## An Occasional Word...

# capacious

*adjective*

*able to hold much*

Mindful of her love of spontaneous retail therapy, she was careful to always accessorise with a capacious handbag.

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## An Occasional Word...

# hoyden

*noun*

*boisterous girl*

He found himself, once again, attracted to a hoyden with big feet.

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## An Occasional Word...

# pulchritudinous

*adjective*

*beautiful*

He continues to derive pleasure from her pulchritudinous presence.

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## An Occasional Word...

**anserine**

*adjective*

*like a goose*

The meeting was characterised by his usual anserine behaviour.

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## An Occasional Word...

# cacography

*noun*

*bad handwriting*

The excellence of his cacography indicated his suitability for a career in medicine.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

# An Occasional Word...

## excrescence

*noun*

*an ugly addition*

He would be horrified to discover that his recent foray into facial hair growth was widely considered an excrescence.

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## An Occasional Word...

# tinctorial

*adjective*

*of or pertaining to colour*

He revelled in the opportunity to reveal his tinctorial and cacophonous splendour.

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## An Occasional Word...

# meretricious

*adjective*

*showy but falsely attractive*

He wondered if there was any mitigating irony in the meretricious splendour of his colleague's new wardrobe.

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## An Occasional Word...

# prolegomenon

*noun*

*a preface or introduction*

He continued to ignore the indisputable fact that too many of his best jokes seemed to require a prolegomenon to ensure comprehension by the target audience.

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## An Occasional Word...

# prandial

*adjective*

*of dinner*

If anyone calls, he's partaking of a prandial pause.

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## An Occasional Word...

# fugacious

*adjective*

*fleeting*

Is there anything more fugacious than fame, especially for those unencumbered by talent, merit, or discernable character?

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# An Occasional Word...

**emetic**

*adjective*

*causing vomiting*

He arrived marinated in what could only be described as an emetic aftershave.

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## An Occasional Word...

# fuliginous

*adjective*

*sooty*

There was a loud poof and in an instant the now fuliginous fellow realises the wisdom of not using flammable liquids to light the barbeque.

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## An Occasional Word...

# larine

*adjective*

*of or pertaining to gulls*

The esurient workers surrounded the tray of leftover boardroom sandwiches in a distinctly larine manner.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds



## An Occasional Word...

# lunula

*noun*

*crescent shaped mark,  
especially at the base of the fingernail*

He was so nervous about calling him he  
chewed a fingernail down to the lunula.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# picaresque

*adj*

*dealing with the episodic adventures of rogues*

He was concerned that the board minutes had taken a distinct turn toward the picaresque.

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## An Occasional Word...

# impecunious

*adj*

*having little or no money*

He was your basic nightmare: tall, dark, handsome, and impecunious.

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## An Occasional Word...

# lucubration

*noun*

*nocturnal study (literally “work by lamplight”)*

How could he convince them that the cause of his morning languor was lucubration and not something more nefarious?

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## An Occasional Word...

# borborygmus

*noun*

*a rumbling of gas in the intestines*

He put the caller on hold for the duration of the borborygmus.

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## An Occasional Word...

**prink**

*verb*

*smarten oneself up*

The first step in prinking oneself is to stop using vulgar words like “tjuzs”.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

# An Occasional Word...

## coruscate

*verb*

*sparkle*

Darling,  
wear what you like,  
just be sure to coruscate!

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# sesquipedalian

*adjective*

*characterised by long words*

He feared his sesquipedalian riposte would once again go unappreciated.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds



## An Occasional Word...

**esurient**

*adjective*

*hungry*

He continued in his attempt to affect the lean, esurient look of a super model.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# ebullience

*noun*

*in high spirits*

Not even the slings and arrow of outrageous fortune seemed capable of calming his ebullience, such was his lack of a cross to bear.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# cachinnate

*verb*

*to laugh loudly*

Given what he was wearing, how could his colleagues do anything but cachinnate?

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# rebarbative

*adjective*

*repellent, unattractive*

Is a polyester tie ever anything but rebarbative?

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# inveigh

*verb*

*to write with hostility*

It required every ounce of his strength to resist the urge to inveigh against the ineffable injustice of it all.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# ineffable

*adjective*

*too great to be uttered*

The new project team writhed in agony as they began to attempt to grapple with the ineffable hugeness of the task before them.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# thalassotherapy

*noun*

*therapeutic treatment using sea water*

He saw the size of the swell and, on medical advice, took the day off to pursue a course of intensive thalassotherapy.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# soporific

*adjective*

*tending to produce sleep*

His companion's soporific conversation was in need of some metaphoric caffeine.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds



## An Occasional Word...

# brook

*verb*

*to tolerate*

My business cannot brook this dalliance.

*Shakespeare, Comedy of Errors*

How furious and impatient they be,  
And cannot brook competitors in love?

*Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus*

But I do wonder his insolence can brook to be  
commanded

*Shakespeare, Coriolanus*

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## An Occasional Word...

**flagitious**

*adj*

*utterly villainous*

Nefarious does not begin to describe such a flagitious fellow.

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## An Occasional Word...

# ventricose

*adj*

*having a protruding belly*

Budgie smugglers have a tendency to not flatter the ventricose.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# paraph

*noun*

*a flourish after a signature*

If he were ever going to be taken seriously as a famous person, he would need to augment his autograph with a characteristic paraph.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# cacology

*noun*

*bad choice of words*

His correspondent's ineluctable cacology led him to seriously consider following Virginia into the Ouse.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# effulgent

*adjective*

*radiant, shining brilliantly*

Put on your sunnies,  
here comes the effulgent one!

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# vicinage

*noun*

*neighbourhood, surrounding district*

The saw who was moving in and declared,  
“There goes the vicinage”.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

**aestivate**

*verb*

*to pass the summer*

If he couldn't aestivate on the beach, at least he could do it somewhere air-conditioned.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds



## An Occasional Word...

# ineluctable

*adj*

*that cannot be escaped from*

The ineluctable turbidity of the prose was beginning to abrade his usual ebullience.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

# An Occasional Word...

**anomic**

*adjective*

*lacking the usual social standards*

Better anomic than anaemic.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

# An Occasional Word...

## accidie

*noun*

*sloth and laziness*

He found himself once again dreaming of extended periods of therapeutic accidie.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# sudatory

*adjective*

*promoting perspiration*

He found even the mere thought of the looming deadlines was rather sudatory.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

# An Occasional Word...

## atticism

*noun*

*elegance of speech*

A life replete with atticism  
is no cause for criticism;  
does not the joy of witticism  
build bridges over ev'ry schism?

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# accouchement

*noun*

*childbirth*

His plan was to be as far from the actual accouchement as possible, preferably in an establishment specialising in the conveyance of ameliorating liquors.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# pugilistic

*adjective*

*like a boxer*

Any hope of a gentle approach was countermanded by the pugilistic manner of the bellicose.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# effluent

*adjective*

*flowing forth*

He effluent eloquence showed no signs of abating.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds



## An Occasional Word...

# concinnity

*noun*

*elegance of literary style*

They feared his attempt to engender the policy and procedures with a modicum of concinnity would prove to be his undoing.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# egregious

*adjective*

*outstandingly bad*

What remained for him to determine was whether the film was completely without merit or merely egregious.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# thaumaturge

*noun*

*a worker of miracles or wonders*

The challenge of characterising the difference twixt a technical writer and a thaumaturge continues to confound our finest minds.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# psittacine

*adjective*

*of or pertaining to parrots; parrot like*

His psittacine method of learning things meant he could talk the talk but tended to limp rather painfully when attempting to walk the walk.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# hebdomadal

*adjective*

*weekly, from the Latin for seven (hepta)*

The hebdomadal symposium began, as was its custom, with a toast to sobriety.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# procrustean

*adjective*

*seeking to enforce uniformity*

He vowed to fight the procrustean perfidy of middle-class mediocrity until his dying breath.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

## An Occasional Word...

# lachrymatory

*adjective*

*causing tears*

The last of the occasional words: he feared it would be a lachrymatory farewell.

Healthy vocabularies build healthy minds

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