



# Shit

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***Shit*** is a word considered vulgar and profane in Modern English. As a noun it refers to fecal matter, and as a verb it means to defecate; in the plural ("the shits") it means diarrhea. ***Shite*** is a common variant in British and Irish English.<sup>[1]</sup> As a slang term, it has many meanings, including: nonsense, foolishness, something of little value or quality, trivial and usually boastful or inaccurate talk, or a contemptible person. It may also be used as an expression of annoyance, surprise, or anger.

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## Etymology

The word is likely derived from Old English, having the nouns *scite* (dung, attested only in place names) and *scitte* (diarrhoea), and the verb *scītan* (to defecate, attested only in *bescītan*, to cover with excrement); eventually it morphed into Middle English *schütte* (excrement), *schyt* (diarrhoea) and *shiten* (to defecate), and it is virtually certain that it was used in some form by preliterate Germanic tribes at the time of the Roman Empire. The word may be further traced to Proto-Germanic *\*skit-*, and ultimately to Proto-Indo-European *\*skheid-* "cut, separate", the same root believed to have become the word *shed*. The word has several cognates in modern Germanic languages, such as German *Scheiße*, Dutch *schijt*, Swedish *skit*, Icelandic *skítur*, Norwegian *skitt* etc. Ancient Greek had 'skōr' (gen. 'skatos' hence 'scato-'), from Proto-Indo-European *\*sker-*, which is likely unrelated.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Usage

The word *shit* (also *shite* in British and Hiberno-English) is usually avoided in formal speech. Minced oath substitutes for the word *shit* in English include *shoot*, *shucks*, and *sugar*.

In the word's literal sense, it has a rather small range of common usages. An unspecified or collective occurrence of feces is generally *shit* or *some shit*; a single deposit of feces is sometimes *a shit* or *a piece of shit*; and to defecate is *to shit* or *to take a shit*. While it is common to speak of shit as existing in *a pile*, *a load*, *a hunk*, and other quantities and configurations, such expressions flourish most strongly in the figurative. For practical purposes, when actual defecation and excreta are spoken of, it is either through creative euphemism or with a vague and fairly rigid literalism.

*Piece of shit* may also be used figuratively to describe a particularly loathsome individual.

### Vague noun

*Shit* can be used as a generic mass noun similar to *stuff*; for instance, *This show is funny shit* or *This test is hard shit*, or *That was stupid shit*. These three usages (with *funny*, *hard*, and *stupid* or another synonym of *stupid*) are heard most commonly in the United States.

In the expression *Get your shit together!* the word *shit* may refer to some set of personal belongings or tools, or to one's wits, composure, or attention to the task at hand. *He doesn't have his shit together* suggests he is failing rather broadly, with the onus laid to multiple personal shortcomings, rather than bad luck or outside forces.

To *shoot the shit* is to have a friendly but pointless conversation, as in "Come by my place some time and we'll shoot the shit."

A *shithole* is any unpleasant place to be, much like a hellhole. This usage originates from a reference to a pit toilet.

The phrase *built like a brick shithouse* is used to compliment a person, or sometimes a thing, by suggesting it is well-built or aesthetically attractive. In English-speaking countries other than the U.S. it is used to compliment men with athletic physiques; in the U.S. it is used to compliment particularly

shapely women.<sup>[3]</sup> This meaning originates from the observation that most shithouses are rather ramshackle affairs constructed of plywood or scrap sheets of steel. For those in need, and in inclement weather, certainly a brick shithouse would be a welcome sight.

*The shitter* is a slang term for a toilet, and can be used akin to the phrase ...*down the toilet* to suggest that something has been wasted. Example: "This CD player quit working one friggin' week after I bought it, and I lost the receipt! Twenty bucks right down the shitter!"

*Shit on a shingle* is a U.S. military slang term for creamed chipped beef on toast. In polite company this can be abbreviated as *SOS*.<sup>[4][5]</sup>

## Surprise

*To shit oneself* or *to be scared shitless* can be used to refer to surprise or fear, usually figuratively. The variation *to shit bricks* can be commonly seen in a form of Internet meme which goes by the phrase *when you see it, you will shit bricks*, used in connection with an image of a busy scene with an often unnoticed laughing face or disturbing object which is hard to see until you study the picture.

The word can also be used to represent anger, as in *Jim is totally going to flip his shit when he sees that we wrecked his marriage*.

## Trouble

*Shit* can be used to denote trouble, by saying one is in *a lot of shit* or *deep shit* (a common euphemism is *deep doo-doo*). It's common for someone to refer to an unpleasant thing as *hard shit* (*You got a speeding ticket? Man, that's some hard shit*), but the phrase *tough shit* is used as an unsympathetic way of saying *too bad* to whoever is having problems (*You got arrested? Tough shit, man!*) or as a way of expressing to someone that they need to stop complaining about something and cope with it instead (Billy: *I got arrested because of you!* Tommy: *Tough shit, dude, you knew you might get arrested when you chose to come with me.*) Note that in this case, as in many cases with the term, *tough shit* is often said as a way of pointing out someone's fault in his/her own current problem. It's also common to express annoyance by simply saying *Shit*.

*Up shit creek* or especially *Up shit creek without a paddle* describes a situation in which one is in severe difficulties with no apparent means of solution.

*Shit happens* means that bad happenings in life are inevitable. This is usually spoken with a sigh or a shrug, but can be spoken derisively to someone who complains too often about his ill fortunes, or in an irritating manner.

*When the shit hits the fan* is usually used to refer to a specific time of confrontation or trouble, which requires decisive action. This is often used in reference to combat situations and the action scenes in movies, but can also be used for everyday instances that one might be apprehensive about. *I don't want to be here when the shit hits the fan!* indicates that the speaker is dreading this moment (which can be anything from an enemy attack to confronting an angry parent or friend). *He's the one to turn to when the shit hits the fan* is an indication that the person being talked about is dependable and will not run from trouble or abandon their allies in tough situations. The concept of this phrase is simple enough, as

the actual substance striking the rotating blades of a fan would cause a messy and unpleasant situation (much like being in the presence of a manure spreader). Whether or not this has actually happened, or if the concept is simply feasible enough for most people to imagine the result without needing it to be demonstrated, is unknown. Another example might be the saying *shit rolls downhill*, a metaphor suggesting that trouble for a manager may be transferred to the subordinates. There are a number of anecdotes and jokes about such situations, as the imagery of these situations is considered to be funny. This is generally tied-in with the concept that disgusting and messy substances spilled onto someone else are humorous.

## Displeasure

*Shit* can comfortably stand in for the terms *bad* and *anything* in many instances (*Dinner was good, but the movie was shit. You're all mad at me, but I didn't do shit!*). A comparison can also be used, as in *Those pants look like shit*, or *This stuff tastes like shit*. Many usages are idiomatic. *I'm shit out of luck* usually refers to someone who is at the end of their wits or who has no remaining viable options. *That little shit shot me in the ass*, suggests a mischievous or contemptuous person. Euphemisms such as *crap* are not usually used in this context.

The term *piece of shit* is generally used to classify a product or service as being sufficiently below the writer's understanding of generally accepted quality standards to be of negligible and perhaps even negative value. The term *piece of shit* has greater precision than *shit* or *shitty* in that *piece of shit* identifies the low quality of a specific component or output of a process without applying a derogatory slant to the entire process. For example, if one said *"The inner city youth orchestra has been a remarkably successful initiative in that it has kept young people off the streets after school and exposed them to culture and discipline, thereby improving their self esteem and future prospects. The fact that the orchestra's recent rendition of Tchaikovsky's Manfred Symphony in B minor was pretty much a piece of shit should not in any way detract from this."* The substitution of *shit* or *shitty* for *pretty much a piece of shit* would imply irony and would therefore undermine the strength of the statement.

The term "I don't/doesn't give a shit" can be used when one does not care about something, or has a passive attitude toward said thing, as it denotes indifference. In context, one can say: *"You're offended? Well, I don't give a shit!"*

“You can’t polish shit” is a popular aphorism roughly equivalent to "putting Lipstick on a pig".

## Dominance

*Shit* can also be used to establish superiority over another being. The most common phrase is *eat shit!* expressing hatred of the addressee. Some other personal word may be added such as *eat my shit* implying truly personal connotations. As an aside, the above is actually a contraction of the phrase *eat shit and die!* It is often said without commas as a curse; they command the other party to perform exactly those actions in that order. However, the term was originally *Eat, Shit, and Die* naming the three most basic things humans have to do, and it is common among soldiers.

The phrase *You ain't shit*, expresses an air of intimidation over the addressee, expressing that they mean nothing or are worthless.

*Hot shit* can be a reference to a matter or thing of supreme importance or urgency ("This report is really hot shit!"). It can be used in adjectival form: "This memo's shit-hot!". *Hot shit* can also refer to a person who either overestimates his own worth or ability, or is highly estimated by others ("He thinks he's some hot shit!" or "He's one hot shit!"). In polite company the euphemism *hotshot* may be substituted when referring to a person.

A speaker may indicate dominance through arrogance using the phrase *His shit don't stink* (though ungrammatical, this is the accepted diction). This conveys that the referent considers himself beyond reproach. For example: "Those pompous assholes in Finance are the ones who laid low the company -- their shit don't even stink!"

## Positive attitude

In North American slang, prefixing the article *the* to *shit* gives it a completely opposite definition, meaning *the best*, as in *Altered Beast is the shit*, or *The Oregon Trail is the shit*. Other slang words of the same meaning, such as *crap*, are not used in such locutions.

## Shortening of *bullshit*

The expression *no shit?* (a contraction of *no bullshit?*) is used in response to a statement that is extraordinary or hard to believe. Alternatively the maker of the hard-to-believe statement may add *no shit* to reinforce the sincerity or truthfulness of their statement, particularly in response to someone expressing disbelief at their statement. *No shit* is also used sarcastically in response to a statement of the obvious, as in *no shit, Sherlock*.

In this form the word can also be used in phrases such as *don't give me that shit* or *you're full of shit*. The term *full of shit* is often used as an exclamation to charge someone who is believed to be prone to dishonesty, exaggeration or is thought to be "phoney" with an accusation. For example:

1. "Oh, I'm sorry I forgot to invite you to the party, it was a complete accident... But you really didn't miss anything anyway."
2. "You're full of shit! You had dozens of opportunities to invite me. If you have a problem with me, why not just say it!"

The word *bullshit* also denotes false or insincere discourse. (*Horseshit* is roughly equivalent, while *chickenshit* means *cowardly*, *batshit* indicates a person is crazy, and *going apeshit* indicates a person is entering a state of high excitement or unbridled rage.) *Are you shitting me?!* is a question sometimes given in response to an incredible assertion. An answer that reasserts the veracity of the claim is, *I shit you not*.

## Emphasis

Perhaps the only constant connotation that *shit* reliably carries is that its referent holds some degree of emotional intensity for the speaker. Whether offense is taken at hearing the word varies greatly according to listener and situation, and is related to age and social class: elderly speakers and those of (or aspiring to) higher socioeconomic strata tend to use it more privately and selectively than younger and more blue-collar speakers.

Like the word *fuck*, *shit* is often used to add emphasis more than to add meaning, for example, *shit! I was so shit-scared of that shithead that I shit-talked him into dropping out of the karate match!* The term *to shit-talk* connotes bragging or exaggeration (whereas *to talk shit* primarily means *to gossip [about someone in a damaging way]* or to talk in a boastful way about things which are erroneous in nature), but in such constructions as the above, the word *shit* often functions as an interjection.

Unlike the word *fuck*, *shit* is not used emphatically with *-ing* or as an infix. For example; *I lost the shitting karate match* would be replaced with *...the fucking karate match*. Similarly, while *in-fucking-credible* is generally acceptable, *in-shitting-credible* is not.

## The verb "to shit"

The preterite and past participle of *shit* are attested as *shat*, *shit*, or *shitted*, depending on dialect and, sometimes, the rhythm of the sentence. In the prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*, *shitten* is used as the past participle; however this form is not used in modern English. In American English *shit* as a past participle is often correct, while *shat* is generally acceptable and *shitted* is uncommon and missing from the *Random House* and *American Heritage* dictionaries.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Backronyms

The backronym form "S.H.I.T." often figures into jokes, like *Special High Intensity Training* (a well-known joke used in job applications), *Special Hot Interdiction Team* (a mockery on SWAT), *Super Hackers Invitational Tournament*, and any college name that begins with an S-H (like *Sam Houston Institute of Technology* or *South Harmon Institute of Technology* in the 2006 film *Accepted* or *Store High In Transit* in the 2006 film *Kenny*). *South Hudson Institute of Technology* has sometimes been used to describe the United States Military Academy at West Point.<sup>[7]</sup> *The Simpsons'* Apu was a graduate student at *Springfield Heights Institute of Technology*.

In polite company, sometimes backronyms such as *Sugar Honey in Tea* or *Sugar Honey Iced Tea* are used.

## "Merde" for "good luck"

In the ballet world, as in theater more generally, a superstition holds that it is bad luck to wish a performer "good luck" before a show (see *break a leg*). Instead, it is traditional to say "merde", which is French for "shit". The origin of this tradition is unknown, but may refer to the droppings left by the horses of the numerous carriages attending a popular performance, or alternatively may be derived from a warning to avoid stepping in manure from the days when dancers would often share a stage with performing animals.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Usage on television

### Canada

In Canada, "shit" is one of the words considered by the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council to be

"coarse, offensive language intended for adults", acceptable for broadcast only after 9:00pm.<sup>[9]</sup>

On the Canadian Showcase television show characters *Trailer Park Boys* frequently use the term "shit". For example, the fictional trailer park supervisor James "Jim" Lahey employs many metaphors with the negative slang "shit" bizarrely worked in; in one episode, Mr. Lahey likens Ricky's growing ignorance to that of a "shit tsunami", while in another episode, Mr. Lahey tells Bubbles the "shit hawks are swooping in low" due to his deplorable behavior and company. The term "shit" is also used in the titles of that show's episodes, themselves, e.g., "The Winds of Shit",<sup>[10]</sup> "A Shit Leopard Can't Change Its Spots",<sup>[11]</sup> and "Never Cry Shitwolf".

## Japan

On Japanese TV, such as anime, that is aired on American television the words "shit" and "bullshit" are uncensored. This is probably because of the ambiguity of the Japanese word "kuso", which may also mean milder swear words like "crap", "crud", "damn", or "darn". It appears in subtitles from inaccurate translations or unsureness of its meaning.

## United Kingdom

The first person to say "shit" on British TV was John Cleese of the *Monty Python* comedy troupe, in the late 1960s, according to his own eulogy<sup>[12]</sup> for Graham Chapman. Also, in the 1969 film *The Big Flame*, a union delegate uses the phrase "thick as pigshit".

## United States

The word has become increasingly acceptable on American cable television and satellite radio, which are not subject to FCC regulation. In other English-speaking countries, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand, the word is allowed to be used in broadcast television by the regulative councils of each area, as long as it is used in late hours when young people are not expected to be watching. It has appeared on ABC News' *20/20*.

"Shit" was one of the original "Seven Words You Can Never Say On TV", a comedy routine by the American comedian George Carlin. In the United States, although the use of the word is censored on broadcast network television (while its synonym *crap* is not usually subject to censorship), the FCC permitted some exceptions. For example:

- The 14 October 1999 episode of *Chicago Hope* is the first show (excluding documentaries) on U.S. network television to contain the word *shit* in uncensored form.
- The word also is used in a later *ER* episode "On the Beach" by Dr. Mark Greene, while experiencing the final stages of a deadly brain tumor. Although the episode was originally aired uncensored, the "shit" utterance has since been edited out in syndicated reruns.
- An episode of *South Park*, "It Hits the Fan" (original airdate 20 June 2001), parodied the hype over the *Chicago Hope* episode. In it, "shit" is used 162 times, and a counter in the corner of the screen tallies the repetitions (excluding the 38 instances of the word's use in written forms, the raising the total to an even 200). *South Park* airs on American cable networks, which are outside

the FCC's regulatory jurisdiction and whose censorship of vulgar dialogue is at the discretion of the cable operators.<sup>[13]</sup>

Since that episode, the word has become a mainstay of *South Park*, along with programming on other cable networks including FX and as of March 2014, Adult Swim. Episodes of *Graceland*, on the USA Network, also use "shit" regularly.

## Usage in radio

### United States

Unlike satellite radio, American terrestrial radio stations must abide by FCC guidelines on obscenity to avoid punitive fines. These guidelines do not define exactly what constitutes obscenity, but it has been interpreted by some commissioners as including any form of words like *shit* and *fuck*, for whatever use.

Despite this, the word has been featured in popular songs that have appeared on broadcast radio in cases where the usage of the word is not audibly clear to the casual listener, or on live television. For example:

- In the song "Man in the Box" by Alice in Chains, the line "Buried in my shit" was played unedited over most rock radio stations.
- The 1973 Pink Floyd song "Money" from the album *The Dark Side of the Moon* contains the line "Don't give me that do goody good bullshit," and has frequently been broadcast unedited on US radio.
- The 1980 hit album *Hi Infidelity* by REO Speedwagon contained the song "Tough Guys" which had the line "she thinks they're full of shit," that was played on broadcast radio.
- On 3 December 1994, Green Day performed "Geek Stink Breath", on *Saturday Night Live*, *shit* was not edited from tape delay live broadcast. The band did not appear on the show again until 9 April 2005.

Some notable instances of censorship of the word from broadcast television and radio include:

- Steve Miller's "Jet Airliner." Although radio stations have sometimes played an unedited version containing the line "funky shit going down in the city." The songs was also released with a "radio edit" version, replacing the "funky shit" with "funky kicks". Another version of "Jet Airliner" exists in which the word "shit" is faded out.
- Likewise, the Bob Dylan song "Hurricane" has a line about having no idea "what kind of shit was about to go down," and has a radio edit version without the word.
- Gwen Stefani's "Hollaback Girl" video had the original album's use of the word censored in its video.
- The music video title "...on the Radio (Remember the Days)" by Nelly Furtado replaced by the original title "Shit on the Radio (Remember the Days)."
- This also happened to "That's That Shit" by Snoop Dogg featuring R. Kelly, which became "That's That".
- In Avril Lavigne's song "My Happy Ending," the Radio Disney edit of the song replaces "all the shit that you do" with "all the stuff that you do."



- Likewise, in the song "London Bridge" by the Black Eyed Peas member Fergie, the phrase "Oh Shit" is repeatedly used as a background line. A radio edit of this song replaced "Oh Shit" with "Oh Snap."

## Usage in campaigns

### Sanitation promotion

Using the term "shit" (or other locally used crude words) - rather than feces or excreta - during campaigns and triggering events is a deliberate aspect of the community-led total sanitation approach which aims to stop open defecation, a massive public health problem in developing countries.<sup>[14][15]</sup>

## See also

- Feces
- Profanity
- Seven dirty words
- Shinola
- Shit happens
- Talking shit

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### Notes

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## External links

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