

How did Shakespeare change the English language?

Shakespeare is universal - Howard Bloom



When William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was alive the English language did not have a standardised written form. There were regional differences in vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, syntax and spelling. Shakespeare played a leading role in establishing a new set of conventions. His work the reference point for those trying to formulate rules. It was also the exemplar for other writers to emulate

What makes Shakespeare special?

Shakespeare wrote some of the most famous plays in world literature, including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*. He also revolutionised two areas of literature: poetry and drama. He popularized [blank verse](#): poetry written in unrhymed [iambic pentameter](#).^[1] He introduced a new psychological complexity to his characters and found new words to express that complexity .

By the 19th Century, every educated person in the western world had some knowledge of Shakespeare and his work. Today he is considered the greatest writer in any language.

Vocabulary

Shakespearean is the most quoted writer in [Samuel Johnson's A Dictionary of the English Language](#). He introduced and/or popularized more vocabulary than any other writer.

In all of his plays, sonnets and narrative poems – Shakespeare uses 17,677 words: Of those, 1,700 were first used by Shakespeare This was at a time when the average active vocabulary was less than 1,000. [Source](#).

Did Shakespeare invent all these new words?

One expert thinks not:

the Victorian scholars who read texts for the first edition of the OED paid special attention to Shakespeare: [H]is texts were cited more often, so he is often credited with the first use of words which can, in fact, be found in other writers.

Which words are usually attributed to Shakespeare?

A very large number. They include:

- ❑ **accommodation, aerial, amazement, assassination, auspicious,**
- ❑ **baseless, bloody, bump,**
- ❑ **castigate, control, countless, courtship, critic, critical,**
- ❑ **dishearten, dislocate, dwindle**
- ❑ **exposure, frugal, generous, gloomy, hurry, laughable [full list here](#)**

How did Shakespeare expand our vocabulary?

by changing nouns into verbs & verbs into adjectives, connecting words never before used together, adding prefixes and suffixes, and devising words wholly original."

[source](#)

He also used unexpected word combinations: *arch- villain, well bred*

What are his most famous phrases?

They are too numerous to list. Here is a very short list:

- *star crossed lovers* - Romeo and Juliet
- *sound and fury* - Macbeth
- *salad days* - Anthony and Cleopatra
- *neither a borrower nor a lender be* - Hamlet
- *brave new world* - The Tempest
- *a foregone conclusion* - Othello
- *a sorry sight* - Macbeth
- *all corners of the world* - Cymbeline
- *all's well that ends well* - All's Well That Ends Well.

Which phrases falsely attributed to Shakespeare?

It's Greek to me, The naked truth, To play fast and loose, Till the last gasp, Laughing stock, a fool's paradise and many more.