

ESSAY 1 PHASE 2

Student 2 • Prof. Mani • Fall 2020

R/campingandhiking is a subreddit based on outdoor activities, the goal of which is to spread knowledge and experiences from the outdoors in the community. The average posts are usually scenic pictures taken by users, but can be as diverse as text posts, gear lists, and Q&As. Members of the subreddit communicate with distinct colloquialisms and jargon, either based on mainstream words or created entirely on r/campingandhiking. Shortened words and acronyms help users communicate with more ease and make the discourse easier, because they are quicker to type and read. Other slang words are more distinct to users “in the know”, and the function of these words and phrases is to determine experience levels and appear more knowledgeable. The lexis in this subreddit makes it easier to spread information and advice on gear, etiquette, food, and any other questions members may have, and to determine skill levels in the context of r/campingandhiking

Some of the language used in the subreddit can be applied in other communities, however a few words stick out as unique. These acronyms and shortened words develop naturally in the community to promote ease of communication, because members using the lexis won't have to use full technical names and phrases, making communication quicker. An example of an acronym that can be used almost anywhere online is “AFAIK” which is an acronym for “as far as I know”. This can be used in any other discourse community and makes its appearances in r/campingandhiking. It is mainly a term used when you want to give advice but are not totally sure, and many people on r/campingandhiking do just that. The first of the more unique words, MRE, stands for “Meal, ready to eat”. These are packaged meals given to military personnel and used by members of the r/campingandhiking community for their easy portability. The full name is never used in the discourse, MRE has developed into almost a word all its own in the subreddit. Another example, SAR stands for “search and rescue” teams that go find lost people who may be in danger in the wilderness. To an outsider this word could not be deciphered without context. These rescue workers are very important to community members who come into dangerous situations in the field. A 14er is a shortened version of “fourteener”, which is a slang term to describe a mountain, the summit of which is fourteen thousand feet above sea level or higher. This is

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used because many members of the community are in fact mountain climbers as well as campers and hikers.

Besides terminology created entirely within the sub-reddit, users also make use of seldom used, niche English words. The following term is a proper English word, but is not well known to people who aren't part of this specific community. The name for travelling to a remote location over land, usually in a vehicle rather than on foot, is overlanding. This activity involves traversing a given distance over land to a desired location and removing any obstacles in the way. Overlanders will usually have a kit to get their vehicle through dense areas by using saws to cut trees, and blades against shrubbery. Many r/campingandhiking community members take part in overlanding, to get to remote outdoor spots. Another English word is "glamping", this is the word used in the community to describe being in the wilderness, but having luxuries like technology, and comfort items. Glamping typically involves expensive equipment, artificial heat in cold places, having the best foods. The lexis is not complicated, but some of it can be new to most people. The users who know these terms meanings tend to be experienced in the discourse lingo, and these individuals stand out as higher up.

Experience, on the subreddit and in real life, is the major determinant of hierarchy in this community. Those who are the most experienced in the outdoors with camping and hiking are typically revered in the subreddit more than newcomers. There is a special respect for people considered "old timers". These are typically older people, as the name suggests, who are seasoned hikers and campers. The term can be applied to older people in many other communities as well as real life and is almost never used to refer to younger or middle-aged people. Old timers know things that can only be learned through experience, and many years of learning. There are few old timers active on the subreddit but they are idolized and referred to often by the users. A "gatekeeper" is someone who decides which individuals have rights or don't in a community. In r/campingandhiking these people are typically more seasoned, and judge newcomers who may not be prepared, or are ill-equipped for an outing. These individuals are only looking to steer others in the right direction and are the majority of users who would identify as "gatekeepers". These people are more benevolent than judgemental. There are however "gatekeepers" who create toxicity by shaming newcomers for their lack of

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experience, or in some cases expensive name brand gear. This goes both ways, and other “gatekeepers” will judge individuals simply because they do in fact have brand new gear. An example of a source of judgement comes from an activity called “glamping” detailed earlier, involving luxuries of heat and expensive food. This is typically said in a derogatory sense and insinuates that users who “glamp” are not truly hiking and camping and therefore should not be members of the community. Glamping is looked down upon by many members of the community, even the benevolent ones.

Some of the terms used in r/campingandhiking are the names of singular products but applied as a blanket term over all the similar products. This comes about because those products are prominent in the culture of the community. For example, Garmin is a company that makes portable GPS, and is well known in the community. Garmin is very important to members of the community who use it to navigate in the wilderness, and some completely depend on them. Many members use Garmin as their word for all GPS because it is so well known, and reputable. This practice can be looked at in two ways. Purists may detest referring to their equipment by a generic term like so and look down on this language. The people who do in fact use the blanket terms however come off as experienced and knowledgeable on proper gear, to most users.

On September 5th, 2020, a reddit user made a post detailing his experience with “noobs” in the outdoors. These people are walking trails in the wilderness with no safety equipment or supplies. They have no “Garmin” and instead use their phone maps to navigate trails. Their plans if they become stranded or lost are just to call “SAR”. He makes it very clear that he does not want to “gatekeep” these people but asks for advice on how to politely advise them. He is informed that a lot of “old timers” used to go out with barely any supplies for their short trips, and that many people now use their phones as GPSs with no safety issues. The user decides that the best thing to do is subtly make sure other hikers are aware how dangerous or difficult a certain trail is, if he feels they are underprepared. This true discourse displays how the users of r/campingandhiking work together to spread knowledge and experience about the outdoors, and determine hierarchy aided by the community’s lexis.

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