



April 22, 2010

Merriam-Webster, Inc.  
47 Federal Street  
P.O. Box 281  
Springfield, MA 01102

Dear Editor,

On behalf of the board of directors and membership of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), I wish to formally and respectfully request the addition of the word “audism” as an entry in Merriam-Webster dictionary products. Citations herein will provide rationale and support for the inclusion of this word, including coinage, subsequent usage, quantity of use, and usage in different forums (academic, literature media, reference, etc.).

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) is the nation's premier civil rights organization of, by and for deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America. Established in 1880, the NAD was shaped by deaf leaders who believed in the right of the American deaf community to use sign language, to congregate on issues important to them, and to have its interests represented at the national level. These convictions remain true to this day, with American Sign Language as a core value.

### **First Usage**

The word “audism” was first coined by Tom L. Humphries, Ph.D. in 1975 in an academic doctorate paper (1975-77), “Communicating Across Cultures (Deaf/Hearing) & Language Learning.” Dr. Humphries defined the word as “the notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears.”

He went on to say that it “appears in the form of people who continually judge deaf people’s intelligence and success on the basis of their ability in the language of the hearing culture. It appears when the assumption is made that the deaf person’s happiness depends on acquiring fluency in the language of the hearing culture. It appears when deaf people actively participate in the oppression of other deaf people by demanding of them the same set of standards, behaviors, and values that they demand of hearing people.”

### **Subsequent Usage & Quantity of Usage**

Since 1975, “audism” has been used in various publications and professional presentations at conferences, as well as at all levels of Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University and other post-secondary universities across the world. This word has been in continuous and increasingly frequent use since its coinage.

“Audism” is used frequently within the deaf community as well as within academia, particularly within Deaf studies curricula. Moreover, the word is already used to a significant degree by society at large in the year 2010. A recent Google search for “audism” yielded 93,800 results. Such a quantity surely qualifies the word for admission into your dictionary products. Search of this word on Yahoo.com returns a result of 167,000 links. Moreover, a search of YouTube.com shows that there are 835 videos invoking “audism”. By comparison, “lookism” – a word in the Merriam-Webster dictionary – when searched, produced 37,000 links on Google.com, 165,000 links on Yahoo.com and only 36 links on YouTube.com

## Widespread Nature of Usage

“Audism” is not used solely in one arena such as academia or within only one sector of the populace, namely, the American deaf community. While it is already a household word to people within the deaf community and to those who focus on Deaf studies, the word “audism” has been used in the mainstream media including on [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) and [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com). A few stories that mention “audism” are provided for your convenience here with links:

<http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/10/06/college.protesters/index.html>

<http://www.cnn.com/2006/EDUCATION/10/29/gallaudet.president/index.html>

<http://www.usatoday.com/educate/college/firstyear/articles/20061022.htm>

[http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2006/10/online\\_organizinggallaudet\\_uni.htm](http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2006/10/online_organizinggallaudet_uni.htm)

In addition, Wikipedia and About.com both have article entries on “audism. A look for the word on search engines within the Internet shows the range of websites that discuss or include “audism” within the site. The word is prevalent within the deaf community – being used and studied within Deaf Studies curricula on college campuses, and being presented to society in the form of plays, video media, vlogs, and conference workshops.

## Relevance and Impact

The word “audism” has generated great interest within the deaf community as it develops a better understanding of the barriers deaf people face every day in the world. Just as charges of sexism and racism have been alleged and analyzed throughout the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primary, audism is discussed and explored among many deaf people with respect to their daily lives.

Since Dr. Tom L. Humphries first coined the word in 1975, academics and scholars have increasingly put importance in the concept of audism as a significant influence on how deaf individuals are raised, taught, trained, employed, and treated by others, both deaf and not deaf.

Harlan Lane explored audism in his book, *The Mask of Benevolence* (1992) and defined it as “the corporate institution for dealing with deaf people. ... [I]t is the hearing way of dominating, restructuring, and exercising authority over the deaf community.” (p. 43). This examination was explored in an article by a Deaf Studies scholar, H-Dirksen L. Bauman, and the article was published in the *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. Bauman, H-D. L. (2004). Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9:2. (Spring): 239-246. His article titled “Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression” is found online at: <http://jdsde.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/9/2/239>. A review of his article shows the extent and pervasiveness of audism with respect to deaf children and adults. He also includes his view of the three defining aspects of audism.

## Entry into Dictionary

Therefore, at this time, the NAD asks that your reputable dictionary products add “audism” as a word, and submit for your consideration three definitions that have been used by scholars as well as a definition that parallels other –ism words in your dictionary products:

*NAD Letter to Merriam-Webster*  
*April 22, 2010*

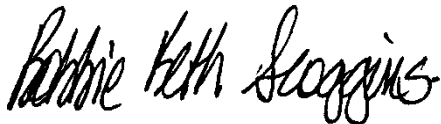
Audism (Ô•diz•m) n.

1. The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears. [Humphries, Tom L. (1975). *Audism: the making of a word*. Unpublished essay.]
2. A system of advantage based on hearing ability. [Bauman, H-D. L. (2004). Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9:2. (Spring): pp 239-246 (citing and adapting analyses from Harlan Lane and David Wellman).]
3. A metaphysical orientation that links human identity with speech. [Bauman, H-D. L. (2004). Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 9:2. (Spring): p 245.]
4. Prejudice, stereotype, or discrimination – both intentional and unintentional – on the basis of hearing, typically against persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. [Adapted from definitions of other –isms found within your dictionary products.]

#### **Request for Dictionary Inclusion**

We look forward to your expeditious response on inclusion of the word “audism” in Merriam-Webster dictionary products.

Sincerely,



Bobbie Beth Scoggins  
President