'Maxxing' selected as Dictionary.com word of the year

Adapted from the BBC article by Ana Faguy and Nardine Saad

Americans have gone all in on "maxxing", making it the 2026 Word of the Year for Dictionary.com. Short for maximising, the term "can be used on its own or added to the end of any word to convey you're doing something to the fullest or optimizing it as much as possible". It's a major departure from two years ago, when the site chose ‘demure’ as word of the year.

"Maxxing is the linguistic manifestation of a culture increasingly preoccupied with getting the most out of everything," said Steve Johnson, director of lexicography for the Dictionary Media Group. Digital media used "maxxing" nearly 19 times more in August 2026 compared to the 2025 monthly average, Dictionary.com found. The site also considered affordability, data centre, and odyssey as potential words of the year.

On social media, many people in Generation Z and younger - those under 30 - post extensively about their maxxing efforts to achieve all sorts of perfection. Influencers focused on fitness and wellness post about "proteinmaxxing" and "fibermaxxing". Those giving their full attention to improving sleep habits say they are "sleepmaxxing". The influencer Clavicular has gained thousands of followers as he chronicles his extreme "looksmaxxing" - working to meet a set of prescribed criteria for attractiveness, with importance given to jawlines, eyes and physique.

"Whatever we're doing, we want to push it further," Johnson said. "But its expanding uses also reveal how people are responding to that impulse. Some embrace it. Some exaggerate it for laughs. Others subvert it entirely by deliberately failing or being consciously mediocre at the activity they are ‘maxxing’.”

Linguist Vanessa Croft, who teaches English, says the internet and digital media make language move at "warp speed", even faster than radio, film or television ever did. As swiftly as new terms are added to the lexicon, they can just as quickly fall out of favour. "By the time millennials and older generations start using the terms, Gen Z and Gen Alpha aren't using those terms anymore," she says.

Discussion question:

- Do you think it's an appropriate choice for the Word of the Year 2026? If so, why? If not, why not and which word may be a better choice in your opinion?

Exercise 1: Match the phrases from the text with their definitions

Phrase	**Definition**
Go all in (verb)	
A major departure from (noun phrase)	
Push it further (verb)	
For laughs (prepositional phrase functioning as an adverb)	
Fall out of favour (verb)	
Get the most out of (something) (verb)	

Definitions

- Unseriously; for fun
- To exert more effort than the significant effort already being exerted
- To try achieve something by doing everything possible to make it happen (often involving risk taking)
- To take full advantage of something; to get the most possible benefits from something
- A sudden, often unexpected, and significant change of direction in thought, norms, or action
- To stop being popular

Discussion: Vocabulary in context

1. The article states that some people engage in ‘maxxing’ for laughs, meaning they don’t take it seriously. Have you ever done something ‘for laughs’? What are some activities you can do ‘for laughs’?
2. Have you ever ‘gone all in’ when playing poker, or when doing another activity? What was the result?
3. Give an example of a time when something in your life took a major departure from what was normal for you at the time.
4. You are working hard to improve your English, which is amazing! How can you push it even further?
5. Give me an example of something which was once very popular, but has now fallen out of favour?
6. How do you get the most out of your free time?

Discussion questions: The text

1. Give an example of harmless maxxing and one example of harmful maxxing, in your opinion.
2. "Maxxing is the linguistic manifestation of a culture increasingly preoccupied with getting the most out of everything” - Do you agree that our culture is ‘increasingly occupied with getting the most out of everything”? Why or why not?
3. “The site also considered affordability, data centre, and odyssey as potential words of the year.” - Why were these words also options? In your opinion, would one of these have been a better choice?
4. The article states that people under 30 “post extensively about their maxxing efforts to achieve all sorts of perfection.” - In your opinion, is this trend negative or positive? Why? What do you think contributes to this trend?
5. An expert in the text states: "By the time millennials and older generations start using the terms, Gen Z and Gen Alpha aren't using those terms anymore," - Have you ever experienced this? Give some examples of the different ways the different generations communicate.

Exercise 2: Englishmaxxing

Type of maxxing	Example of how it can be done
Example: “Coffeemaxxing”	Buying the best organic coffee on the market, grinding your own beans, and drinking it black and without sugar. Using a special coffee mug or flask which maintains the temperature for a long time. Breathing in the aroma of the coffee before sipping it slowly and deliberately on an empty stomach (so the caffeine effects are stronger).

Extra tasks

Exercise 3: Do some research

In this lesson, we've discussed looksmaxxing, proteinmaxxing, fibermaxxing, sleepmaxxing and other types of 'maxxing'. Find another example online of a 'maxxing' trend to share with the class (search for 'maxxing trends' or search for the hashtag on a social media channel).

Exercise 4: Making the most of maxxing, or doing it for laughs?

Consider the three 'maxxing' approaches mentioned in the article: its original purpose (getting the most out of something), exaggerated (as a means of critique), and deliberately failing or doing it mundanely (a means of critique).

Consider the three Instagram posts below* and decide which person is 'sleepmaxxing':

a) Seriously
b) Exaggeratedly
c) Mundanely

**Posts have been generated using AI (artificial intelligence).*







Choose any topic and then say how you would ‘max’ this activity in a serious way, an exaggerated way, and an ironic/mundane way.