

From the Archives

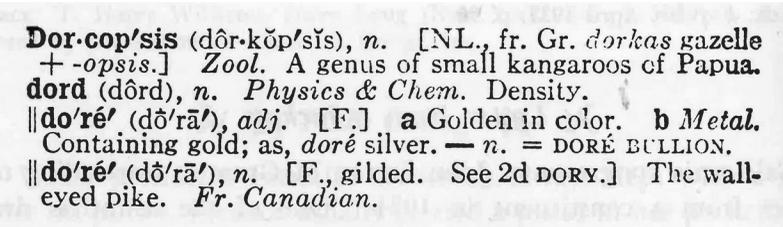
The Word That Does Not Exist**

One day a tired linguist working on the highly esteemed second edition of the 1934 Merriam-Webster New International Dictionary carelessly placed a slip of paper containing the abbreviations for the word “density” (“D. or d. Density”) on the pile of slips for words beginning with the letter *d*. Then another linguist, thinking the slip was in the right place but that the entry on it had been wrongly punctuated, pushed the first four letters together to form the word “dord.” He thoughtfully added the descriptive letter *n* for “noun.” Clearly “Dord” was a noun—it rhymed with “board,” “cord,” and “lord.”

The astute editors of the dictionary soon discovered the errant entry but decided to play a joke on the public and leave it in. They wanted to find out if anyone would catch the “mistake.” So, appearing in the august second edition of the 1934 Merriam-Webster dictionary, on page 771, in the right-hand column, sandwiched in between the words “Dorcopsis” and “doré,” is the following entry: “dord (dôrd), *n. Physics & Chem.* Density.”

“Dord” stayed in the dictionary through several printings, but was finally dropped when new editors took over.

Source: William Morris and Mary Morris, *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 276-77.



Dor-cop/sis (dôr-köp'sîs), *n.* [NL., fr. Gr. *dorkas* gazelle + *-opsis*.] *Zool.* A genus of small kangaroos of Papua.
dord (dôrd), *n.* *Physics & Chem.* Density.
||**do/ré'** (dô'rā'), *adj.* [F.] **a** Golden in color. **b Metal.** Containing gold; as, *doré* silver. — *n.* = DORÉ BULLION.
||**do/ré'** (dô'rā'), *n.* [F., gilded. See 2d DORY.] The wall-eyed pike. *Fr. Canadian.*

The errant entry. WEBSTER'S NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY, 2D ED., 1934.

**In memoriam of all those who felt a pedantic obligation to comment on word selection and usage in *Parameters* over the years.

Source: Richard Shenkman and Kurt Reiger. *Odd, Amusing, and Little-Known Incidents One-Night Stands with American History* (New York: Quill, 1980), 232.