

Keep your English up to date

Newbie

Gavin Dudeney

You might remember seeing two zeros in another word in this series (w00t!) and that there we saw how online gamers and chatters often use their own language and spellings for common words. Newbie (or n00b) is another word that was made popular by these groups of people.

A newbie is a new member of any community, online game or web-based activity. It's a difficult word in that it's often hard to tell the sentiment behind its use. In a purely descriptive way, it simply refers to new members, and doesn't entail any kind of judgement on the part of the user – 'there will be a meeting for newbies on Thursday to go over the basics'. However, it is often used in a derogatory context, with older more experienced members looking down on new members and finding them a distraction or an irritation – 'just ignore the newbies, they're not worth the trouble'.

In the derogatory context you might find 'n00b' to be more common.

Newbie certainly has more history than this - in Vietnam, new arrivals were often referred to as newbies, and 'non-useful bodies' was the term given to new sailors on submarines until they had learnt the necessary skills to contribute to the running of the craft (they were often referred to as N.U.B.s, or 'nubes') – but it is the modern, technology usage which is most common and most widely-recognised.

A word from the wise – if you're a n00b, the best thing you can do is keep your head down and listen for a while. In that respect, online communities are no different from face-to-face ones. Learning the ropes is part of becoming a respected member.



bbclearningenglish.com

© British Broadcasting Corporation 2008