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Wannabe

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A very unusual feature of SOME languages, and of English in particular, is that you can have phrases that can be used as words: a phrase used as a word! 'Wannabe' is a good case in point. It's of course a colloquial version of "want to be" – wannabe: w - a- double n- a – b – e -- sometimes with two e's at the end. If I say "he's a wannabe", what I mean is he's an admirer or a fan; somebody who wants to emulate a celebrity by copying that celebrity's dress or behaviour or something like this.

It actually started back in the United States sometime in the 1980s. I think it first became very popular when people wanted to be like Madonna the pop star. Certainly that's when I first heard it very very regularly and a 'wannabe' person is someone who wants to be as famous, or just get some reflected glory from the person, in this case Madonna, that they were admiring. It reflects the colloquial pronunciation.

Notice, it's not a very polite expression. You can talk about other people as being wannabes, but you wouldn't say that you yourself were a wannabe, and if you say about somebody "he's a wannabe", you're really being a little bit sceptical about that person's state of mind I think, to some extent. But it's a very popular term – you'll hear everybody use it these days.



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