

# What Is a Meme? 10 Meme Examples

---

 [makeuseof.com/tag/what-is-a-meme-examples](https://makeuseof.com/tag/what-is-a-meme-examples)

You've surely seen the word **meme** in your travels around the internet. But if you're not well-versed in internet culture, it can be difficult to find a clear explanation of what exactly a meme is.

We're here to help. Let's go over the definition of memes, explore their usage, and look at some examples of classic memes and those that are popular right now.

## What Is a Meme?

---

You might be surprised to know that the word **meme** didn't originate online. In fact, author Richard Dawkins first used the word in his 1976 work *The Selfish Gene*. The book looked at evolution and used **meme** to describe an idea or behavior that spreads across people in a culture.

When someone says **meme** nowadays, they're probably referring to an **internet meme**. This is the common usage we'll discuss here and builds on Dawkins's use of the term.

For a basic meme definition, we'll use the following:

| A piece of media, often humorous, that spreads rapidly through the internet.

With the instant communication that services like Twitter, Reddit, and similar allow us to perform online, it's no wonder that memes spread so quickly.

Often, memes go through small alterations like the game of telephone. Sometimes, memes even beget new memes. What's fascinating is that the nature of online memes means we can trace their origins, evolution, and changes in popularity.

Now that we have a simple meme definition, we'll look at some meme examples to help you better understand how memes originate and spread. For more on internet culture, make sure you also [know what TLDR means](#).

## Meme vs. Image Macro

---

Before we continue, we should address a common wording mistake. Many people use the word **meme** to refer to any image that has text overlaid on it.

For example, here's a random image of a guy using a computer with some text I added:

The proper term for this is an **image macro**; this is not a meme. Why not? Because this hasn't spread across the internet. It's just a random image I made. If you posted this on Reddit, nobody would recognize the format.

Some image macros are memes, but not all memes are image macros (as we'll discuss below). And someone creating an image macro and sharing it doesn't make it a meme.

## Historical Meme Examples

---

Let's walk through some famous memes from years past.

### 1. LOLcats

---

This classic meme plays on the internet's love of cats. Its format is simple: one or more cats, usually in some adorable situation, with overlaid text. The wording is intentionally poor English that now has its own name: lolspeak.

### 2. Condescending Wonka

---

Here's one of many examples of the Advice Animals subgenre of image macros. Advice Animals refers to an image macro template that revolves around some character trait of the animal (or person) in the image.

In this case, Condescending Wonka is exactly as it sounds. It's an image of Gene Wilder as Willy Wonka, taken from the 1971 movie *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. The meme features patronizing statements from Wonka.

### 3. Gangnam Style

---

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/9bZkp7q19f0>

Gangnam Style is one of the internet's best-known viral videos. It released in July 2012 and quickly spread like wildfire, racking up more than nine million views per day for two months during the height of its popularity. Everyone from mainstream news outlets to celebrities was talking about it before long.

Thousands of people created reaction videos, parodies, and more. It was the first YouTube video to hit both one billion and two billion views. In fact, it had so many views that it surpassed the memory YouTube had for its view counter at the time. And it's still one of YouTube's most-watched videos.

The 15 Most Viewed YouTube Videos Ever The 15 Most Viewed YouTube Videos Ever The most viewed YouTube video has over five billion views. Which of these most liked and watched YouTube videos have you seen? [Read More](#)

Gangnam Style is an unforgettable phenomenon that perfectly illustrates how quickly something can spread through the internet.

### 4. Chuck Norris Facts

---

Chuck Norris has been a martial artist, actor, film director, and more in his life. But online, he's not known for any of that. Instead, he's become famous for "Chuck Norris Facts", a meme that chronicles absurd feats of Norris.

These facts exaggerate his toughness, claiming impossibilities like that he can win a game of Connect Four in three moves. Norris has stated that he finds the facts funny, and has no doubt enjoyed renewed fame from the meme.

## 5. Do a Barrel Roll

---

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/wZ8z9FQEQiQ>

Here's a quote from the 1997 space shooter game Star Fox 64 that has enjoyed a long life on the internet. In the game, your wingmate Peppy advises you to do a barrel roll to avoid enemy fire.

Due to the game's cheesy voice acting, this became an oft-repeated phrase online. It's just one of many gaming memes that made it into the mainstream. In fact, try searching for **do a barrel roll** on Google and see what happens.

20 Popular Gaming Memes Explained: Barrel Rolls and More 20 Popular Gaming Memes Explained: Barrel Rolls and More Gaming memes are a huge part of internet video game culture. Here are 20 of the most popular gaming memes, where they originated, and what they mean. Read More

## Recent Meme Examples

---

In internet time, the above memes are ancient history. Here are some of the most popular memes right now from 2017 and 2018.

## 6. Distracted Boyfriend

---

One of 2017's top memes, this one is largely responsible for the trend of object labeling image macros (in which the meme changes by labeling the image elements). It comes from a stock image where a guy is checking out another woman while his girlfriend has an upset look on her face.

After labeling the objects, the "other woman" usually represents something tempting, while the girlfriend represents what you're supposed to do. It has endless variations, making it a smash hit.

## 7. Who Killed Hannibal?

---

This is one of the most popular memes of 2018 and illustrates several meme principles quite well. It comes from a video clip that's years old, is easy to modify, and continues the recent trend of object labeling.

The original clip comes from The Eric Andre Show, in which Andre “shoots” his co-host Hannibal and then turns to ask who killed him. This became a meme where the characters have labels and Andre asks “Why would X do this?” to point out everyday hypocrisy.

## 8. Elf on the Shelf

---

Elf on the Shelf is a kid’s Christmas book that came with an elf doll. The doll has gone through a few meme variations, but the latest one uses a silly rhyme.

The recent Elf on the Shelf meme includes the caption “You’ve heard of Elf on the Shelf, now get ready for” on an edited image. Like “elf” and “shelf” this image includes two rhyming items, such as “Shrek on a deck” above.

## 9. Shooting Stars

---

Watch Video At: [https://youtu.be/cbKmm\\_xAEro](https://youtu.be/cbKmm_xAEro)

Another slow-burning meme, this one was built around a song released in 2008 by the artist Bag Raiders. Years later, the song started appearing in silly YouTube videos and becoming more popular.

In 2017, Shooting Stars took off thanks to the above video. The song combined with footage of an overweight man diving started a new meme format. Editing clips of people to look like they were flying through space paired perfectly with the song.

## 10. By Age 35

---

Many recent standout memes have been image macros, but not this one. It was a result of Twitter users reacting to a Market Watch article that claimed:

By age 35, you should have twice your salary saved, according to retirement experts.

Many found this absurd advice that most people have no hope of achieving. Thus came all sorts of jabs at the advice, claiming that by age 35, for instance, you should have collected all the Chaos Emeralds from the Sonic games.

## Learn More About Memes

---

We’ve taken a tour of five classic and five modern memes, but this is only a tiny sampling. Memes are constantly emerging and dying off—what’s insanely popular today is stale next week.

Many memes originate from corners of the internet like 4chan and Reddit. Eventually, if they stay popular, they make their way to mainstream social networks. If you keep an eye out, you’ll eventually learn to identify the latest meme trends. Speaking of popular

memes, [Stranger Things memes](#) are doing the rounds these days.

For an all-around reference on memes, we highly recommend checking out [Know Your Meme](#). This encyclopedic resource is dedicated to cataloging the origins, use, and examples of memes. It's a great place to learn how a meme started or see what's popular recently.