

# #ADULTING

A rough guide for Marketers, Researchers + Planners

LISTEN + LEARN  
RESEARCH

# #ADULTING

{def: to behave like a grownup}

**Adulting** made the short list on the American Dialect Society's **word of the year**. Recognising that another niche social media term had joined the mainstream.

But what does it **actually mean**?

For the slightly bewildered journalists covering the story, their response was either balanced and sensitive, or patronising and dismissive.

We wanted to **check the evidence**.

So, we explored a random sample of 500 social media comments, letting us learn how people talk about Adulting in their own words.

Our goal? **To understand what users of the term actually mean by it.**

We hoped to unpack the concept, dispel some myths and challenge some armchair perceptions.

And, give you some ideas about **what to do about it.**

So we're glad to present '**Adulting: 12 ideas for Marketers, Researchers + Planners**'.

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## A definition

**Adulthood** (v): to do grown up things and hold responsibilities such as, a 9-5 job, a mortgage/rent, a car payment, or anything else that makes one think of grown ups.

[courtesy of Urban dictionary]



I made some important phone calls and sent important e-mails today, so I'm going to celebrate my A+ adulthood by having mac and cheese for dinner.

#adulthood can be really great. It's been a busy week, but ending my day with a good #book & a small G&T on our comfy sofa. #lifestyle #BookWorm #blogger

I'm now looking at bank accounts. Too much adulthood today :(

Sometimes I can be an adult, but then other times it's like... nah, I'll have choc chip brioche and nutella for dinner. TGIF. #nutella #ilovenutella #nutellaaddict #brioche #adulthood

BF and I were such adults today, we booked a trip and needed a trolley at tesco #goals #adulthood

I've just ordered our Christmas food delivery & currently feel like I'm adulthood like a boss.

## 1. When + who

**Adulthood** is mostly talked about by women (+60%) in their twenties, covering a wide range of situations and life events.

**IDEA:** **Adulthood** is a connector. It gives 20 something women a common language to share their trials, tribulations and successes.

## 2. Introspection + awareness

Talking about **Adulthood** is mostly a reflective process, bought about by a transition in their lives. It's a question about their sense of progress.

**IDEA:** **Adulthood** drives introspection and so creates an opportunity to support and empathise.

## 3. Feelings + emotions

**Adulthood** is far from vapid, rather it brings with it a wide range of emotional responses from pride and joy (combined +55%) to confusion, shock and resignation (26%).

**IDEA:** Brands could use this emotional richness to design experiences that accentuate the positive and eliminate the negatives.

## 4. Seriousness + sarcasm

**Adulthood** sounds, and often is, playful, ironic, sarcastic and used in a tongue-in-cheek manner. But, most of the time (+70%), it's actually used seriously, reflecting real concerns.

**IDEA:** Take it seriously. For many today, **Adulthood** has come to capture the essence of a particular moment in life.

## 5. Expectations + responsibilities

**Adulthood** is not a juvenile rebellion. It's the progressive realisation of, and surrender to, the demands of responsibility and the weight of social expectations.

**IDEA:** Can you help them adapt and win?

## 6. Markers, rites + ritual

**Adulthood** behaviours are above all predictable, rational, boring and responsible (+80%). Succeeding at Adulthood means getting them right.

**IDEA:** Can you use examples of successful **Adulthood** as to inspire creatives and content?

## 7. Food + Drink

This works 2 ways. Whipping up a good dinner for friends is relatively easy (low cost + learnable skills) and impressive. **Adulthood** fails when they give in to guilty pleasures (etc. McDonalds, Ben & Jerry's).

**IDEA:** Can your brand be empathetic to this need for indulgence, or help them feel more accomplished?

## 8. Progress + retreat

**Adulthood** is not a one-way street. People will veer off the path in search of a counter-balance in their lives. 10% of our sample felt nostalgic about pre-adulthood times and saddened that they had passed.

**IDEA:** What can you offer those needing respite?

## 9. Success + failure

**Adulthood** is tied closely to the idea and expectation of success and failure, in activities both complex and mundane. The temptation not to 'Adult' is strong.

**IDEA:** Can you design experiences that make it easy to win, or at least feel like they're making progress?

## 10. Release + escape

**Adulthood** can get too much. We found 11% of people engaged in some form of compensating behaviours. What's more, to some, **Adulthood** feels contrived and artificial, they do it out of necessity, not choice.

**IDEA:** Can you build opportunities for escapism into your product offer?

## 11. Loneliness + alienation

The social part of **Adulthood** is conspicuous by its absence (-2%). It's mostly a lonely process that individuals need to go through by themselves.

**IDEA:** Can you be there for the journey?

## 12. Let it go...

We could all do with remembering what it's like not to Adult all the time...

**IDEA:** Kick back, have some fun. You've earned it.

# THANK YOU

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