Dutch slang: words you will hear, and when not to use them

Dutch slang is mostly informal spoken Dutch: everyday words such as lekker, vet, gaaf and balen, small words such as hè, toch and hoor, and the street language of young people, straattaal, with words from Sranan, Arabic and English such as doekoe (money) and patta's (shoes). Learn to understand all of them, use the everyday ones with friends and colleagues, and keep them out of formal emails, official appointments and exams. Each table gives the meaning of every word, with who says it and an example, or where it comes from.

Dutch slang, informal Dutch and straattaal

When learners ask about Dutch slang, they usually mean one of three things. The first is informal spoken Dutch: words such as lekker, top and balen that almost every Dutch person uses with friends and would not put in a formal letter. The second is the small words of conversation, hè, toch, hoor and even, which are not slang in the strict sense but make spoken Dutch sound Dutch. The third is straattaal, street language: the words of young people in the cities, many of them from Sranan, the creole language widely spoken in Suriname.

Some words are called slang and are not. Gezellig is ordinary standard Dutch that you can say to anyone; it is on basic Dutch words and phrases with the other words that do not translate. Fixed expressions such as Helaas pindakaas and Dat is een eitje are informal, but they are idioms, and they are on Dutch sayings and idioms. Swear words are not on this page.

Everyday informal words

These are the words of a Friday afternoon at work, a birthday party or a group chat. Most Dutch people use some of them every day; the third column says where each one fits.

Everyday informal Dutch words for good, great and fed up

lekker

Meaning: tasty; also nice, comfortable, pleasant. On its own, Lekker! means great, lovely

Who says it, and where: everyone, of every age; fine for food, sleep and the weather, but said of a person it means attractive

Example: Ik heb lekker geslapen.

chill

Meaning: relaxed, easy, pleasant; the verb chillen is to relax, to hang out

Who says it, and where: young people and many adults, with friends; an English word, said the

English way
Example: Het was een chill weekend.

relaxed
Meaning: relaxed, easy-going, of a person, a place or an evening
Who says it, and where: anyone in casual talk; also English, said the English way
Example: Mijn nieuwe baas is heel relaxed.

vet
Meaning: great, cool (the ordinary meaning is fat)
Who says it, and where: young people and many adults; with friends and people your age
Example: Dat concert was echt vet.

gaaf
Meaning: great, cool (the first meaning, still used, is whole, undamaged)
Who says it, and where: children and adults; in this sense since at least 1980
Example: Wat een gave fiets!

tof
Meaning: great, nice, of a thing or a person
Who says it, and where: everyone; friendly and informal, and in Belgium more common than gaaf
Example: Tof dat je er bent.

top
Meaning: great, perfect, agreed; often the whole answer
Who says it, and where: everyone, in speech and in messages; fine with colleagues
Example: Top, dan zie ik je morgen.

balen
Meaning: to be fed up, bummed, gutted; Wat balen! what a pain
Who says it, and where: everyone; informal, not for an email to a client
Example: Ik baal ervan dat de trein niet rijdt.

The adjectives take an -e before a noun, like any Dutch adjective: een toffe collega, een vette film, and gaaf becomes gave, with a v. Balen is a verb with van: ik baal ervan, I am fed up with it. It comes from an older expression, ergens balen tabak van hebben, literally to have bales of tobacco of something, which was shortened to het is balen and, from the middle of the 20th century, used as a verb.

The small words of spoken Dutch

Most of these words are hard to translate on their own: they change the tone more than the meaning. Leave even out of Kun je even helpen? and the request sounds blunt. Leave hoor out of Het geeft niks, hoor and the comfort sounds flatter. A learner who uses them sounds friendlier.

Small Dutch words that change the tone of a sentence

hè
What it does: at the end of a sentence: ..., right?; on its own: huh?, what?
Who says it, and where: everyone; to ask what someone said, Pardon? is more polite
Example: Koud vandaag, hè?

toch
What it does: at the end of a question: ..., right? You expect a yes
Who says it, and where: everyone, everywhere
Example: Jij komt ook, toch?

hoor
What it does: makes a sentence friendly or reassuring, sometimes a warning: Ja hoor, Nee hoor
Who says it, and where: everyone, everywhere in speech
Example: Het geeft niks, hoor.

even
What it does: just, for a moment; makes a request softer. Said effe, and written ff in messages
Who says it, and where: everyone, everywhere, also at the counter of the gemeente
Example: Kun je even helpen?

joh
What it does: to a friend: hey, come on; Nee joh! means no, of course not
Who says it, and where: friends and family, people you say je to
Example: Nee joh, dat geeft niks.

nou
What it does: well, so; to start a sentence or to round off a conversation
Who says it, and where: everyone
Example: Nou, tot morgen dan.

oké
What it does: OK, fine
Who says it, and where: everyone, in speech and in messages
Example: Oké, ik bel je straks.

sowieso
What it does: anyway, in any case; in messages often sws
Who says it, and where: everyone; borrowed from German about a hundred years ago
Example: Ik kom sowieso.

Most of them are among the 1,000 most common Dutch words: toch, even, nou, oké and hoor all are, and so is lekker from the first table, so you will hear them every day. Unlike the words in the first table, and apart from joh, they are fine with almost anyone, also with people you say u to. The informal hi and bye, hoi and doei, are different: they are for people you say je to. When to use them, and when hallo and dag are better, is on Dutch greetings.

Older slang from Yiddish and Bargoens

Some ordinary informal Dutch words are much older than they sound. They came from Yiddish, the language of the Ashkenazi Jews of the Netherlands, above all in Amsterdam, often through Bargoens, the secret language of traveling traders and vagrants, and later of thieves, which mixed Dutch with words from Yiddish and Romani. Many Bargoens words slipped into everyday speech and lost their secret. Tof, in the first table, is one of them: it goes back to the Hebrew tov, good.

Informal Dutch words from Yiddish and Bargoens

de gozer
Meaning: guy, bloke
Where it comes from: Yiddish, through Bargoens; most sources trace it to a word for bridegroom

de mazzel
Meaning: luck; mazzel hebben is to be lucky
Where it comes from: Yiddish, from Hebrew

het geintje
Meaning: a joke; Geintje! means just kidding
Where it comes from: Hebrew, through Yiddish

jatten
Meaning: to steal, to pinch, to nick
Where it comes from: Bargoens, built on the Yiddish word for hand

het smoesje
Meaning: an excuse, usually a made-up one
Where it comes from: Yiddish, from a word for talk

All five are informal but not rude, and people of every age use them. Keep them out of formal Dutch: in a police report a bike is gestolen, not gejat.

Straattaal: youth words from Sranan, Arabic, English and Papiamento

Straattaal is the slang of young people, first in Amsterdam and the other big cities of the Randstad. The linguist René Appel published the first study of it in 1999. Most of its words come from Sranan, with others from English, Moroccan Arabic and Riffian Berber and a few from Papiamento, the language of Curaçao, and the accent it is spoken with is often Moroccan Dutch.

It has not gone away. In a study of the Meertens Instituut published in January 2026, 573 young people were shown Appel's words of 1999: most are still known and used, and they have spread from the big cities to the whole country. At least nine in ten recognized patta's, doekoe and loesoe, among others. Knowing is not using: about nine in ten knew doekoe, and about three in ten said they use it. Nearly every young person knows some straattaal, but it is mainly boys who grow up with more than one language who say they use it; according to the researchers, boys use it to sound tough, girls more often as a joke.

Common Dutch straattaal words

patta's
Meaning: shoes, sneakers
Where it comes from: Sranan
Note: the best-known straattaal word for shoes

doekoe
Meaning: money

Where it comes from: Sranan duku, money
Note: in the Van Dale dictionary for more than twenty years

osso
Meaning: house, home
Where it comes from: Sranan oso, from English house
Note: in the Van Dale dictionary since 2019

mattie
Meaning: friend, mate
Where it comes from: Sranan mati, friend
Note: close in sound and meaning to Dutch maat, mate

fawaka
Meaning: how are you?, also short faka
Where it comes from: Sranan fa waka, how goes it
Note: in the Van Dale dictionary since 2015

ewa
Meaning: hey, hi
Where it comes from: Moroccan Arabic
Note: ewa drerrie, hey dude, was the Flemish children's word of the year in 2020

wollah
Meaning: I swear, really
Where it comes from: Arabic wallah, by God
Note: in the Van Dale dictionary since 2008; an oath by God

loesoe
Meaning: wild, crazy; in 1999 it meant gone
Where it comes from: Sranan
Note: a word whose meaning has moved

dushi
Meaning: sweet, lovely, tasty
Where it comes from: Papiamento, the language of Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire
Note: also darling, to someone you love; to someone you do not know, it sounds like flirting

Straattaal changes: loesoe shifted its meaning in 25 years, while patta's and doekoe stayed as they were. English feeds youth language in general, outside straattaal too: an Onze Taal list of the words of each generation, from 2026, has chill, cool, slay and lit next to Dutch vet . For a learner, the use of this table is to understand what you hear on the train or from a colleague's teenage children.

When not to use Dutch slang

Plain Dutch is never wrong. Slang is out of place here:

- **At work, until you know the tone.** Workplaces differ: in some, colleagues say vet, balen or top in a meeting. Follow them, and in an email to a client, a job interview or your first week, use plain Dutch. Top in a reply to a colleague is fine almost everywhere.
- **At the gemeente, the doctor's and the police.** Use u and neutral words: jammer (a

pity) instead of balen, goed or prima instead of vet. The small words of the second table are the exception: even, hoor, toch and oké are fine in any office.

- **In exams.** In the inburgeringsexamen and the Staatsexamen NT2 the tasks are letters, forms and everyday situations with neighbors, colleagues and officials. Write and speak plain standard Dutch there; slang adds nothing. What each exam asks is on the inburgering exam.
- **With older people you do not know.** Leuk, mooi, fijn and goed say what vet and gaaf say, and they work with anyone.
- **Straattaal, unless it is your group's.** Words such as wollah and mattie belong to the young people who grew up with them. Learn to recognize them; from a newcomer they can sound forced, or like an imitation of a group you do not belong to. Wollah is also an oath by God, which religious people may not like to hear said lightly.
- **In writing.** ff and sws belong in app messages to friends. In an email, write even and sowieso in full.

See it in a text

The free texts on this site are written in standard Dutch, but the people in them talk the way Dutch people talk, with the small words of the second table. Each sentence below is quoted word for word from its text.

- **'Rustig maar,' zegt de vrouw in het blauwe shirt. 'Even kijken.'** "Take it easy," says the woman in the blue shirt. "Let me just have a look." (Even makes it friendly. Controle, A1)
- **'Lekker!' zegt de buurvrouw. 'Dit is melk van Gea. Je woont hier pas een week. En je kent de melktap al!'** "Lovely!" says the neighbor. "This is Gea's milk. You have only lived here a week. And you already know the milk tap!" (Melk op zondag, A1)
- **De verkoper denkt na. 'Oké, 100 euro,' zegt hij.** The seller thinks. "OK, 100 euro," he says. (Een nieuwe fiets, A2)
- **'En jij fietst, hè? Zet je fiets altijd op slot, hoor. Ook hier bij het ziekenhuis.'** "And you cycle, right? Always lock your bike, you know. Here at the hospital too." (Hè asks for a yes, and hoor makes the advice friendly, with a warning inside. De fiets van 40 euro, A2)
- **'Dinsdag ben je jarig, toch? Wat ga je trakteren?'** "It's your birthday on Tuesday, right? What are you going to treat us to?" Elif does not know the word trakteren and answers 'Ja, lekker!', and that is where the misunderstanding of the story starts. (Trakteren, B1)

The research on this page

- Appel, R. (1999). Straattaal: de mengtaal van jongeren in Amsterdam. Toegepaste Taalwetenschap in Artikelen 62.
- Mourigh, K., Doreleijers, K. and Grondelaers, S. (2026). Hoe straattaal heel Nederland veroverde. Onze Taal 2026, number 1. Summary: Meertens Instituut, 8 January 2026.

Read next

De fiets van 40 euro is a free A2 story with a glossary, set in a hospital kitchen: Femke, who has worked there for twelve years, talks to the new one, Mira, with hè and hoor, and Mira has a blue bike that was a little too cheap. More stories at this level are in the free A2 texts.

For a whole book at A2, Dracula is the first volume of the Dutch Readers series: the famous story retold in easy Dutch in eight short chapters, with an English glossary after each one. It is out as a paperback and on Kindle.

What are the most common Dutch slang words?

In everyday Dutch: lekker, vet, gaaf, tof, chill, top and balen, and the small words hè, toch, hoor and even, which everyone says. Among young people, straattaal words such as patta's (shoes), doekoe (money), osso (home) and wollah (I swear) are known all over the country.

Is gezellig a slang word?

No. Gezellig is ordinary standard Dutch for a good, warm time with other people. It sounds warm, and you can say it to anyone, from a friend to your neighbor of eighty.

What does wollah mean?

I swear, really. It comes from the Arabic wallah, by God, and is one of the best-known words of Dutch straattaal; it has been in the Van Dale dictionary since 2008. Because it is an oath in origin, religious people may not like it said lightly.

Should I use Dutch slang as a learner?

Understand it first. The everyday words such as lekker, top and balen and the small words such as even and hoor are worth using with friends and colleagues from the start. Keep straattaal for listening, and keep slang out of formal emails, official appointments and exams.