

Letters | Too Many 'Omics

By **David Colquhoun**



It is an old maxim that if you want to get on, invent a new word for your particular niche in an old area, and so become an instant expert. This process seems to have gone mad. A recent article in *The Scientist* that referred to "nutri genomics"¹ prompted me to see just how many -omics had now been coined. Well over 100 neologisms are listed at [<http://www.genomicglossaries.com/content/omes.asp>]. A few of the more ghastly examples are foldomics, functomics, GPCRomics, inomics, ionomics, interactomics, ligandomics, localizomics, pharmacomethylomics and separomics. None of these refers to areas of work that did not exist before the coining of the new word. Perhaps, as an electrophysiologist working on recombinant ion channels, I should dub myself an expert on ohmomics.

This habit of coining fancy words for old ideas might be thought harmless, merely a source of endless mirth for thinking scientists. I'm not so sure though. Apart from reinforcing the view of scientists as philistine illiterates (at least when it comes to etymology), actual harm is done to science as the public becomes aware that some among us seem to prefer long words to clarity of thought.

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References

1. L Pray "Dieting for the genome generation," *The Scientist* 19(1): 14-16. [[Full Text](#)] Jan. 17, 2005