

'How many aura points did I lose?' The new coolness currency has hints of Aristotle

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. How well do you know Gen Alpha slang? Match the words to their definitions below.

- | | |
|---------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. rizz | a. something excellent or impressive |
| 2. cap | b. suspicious |
| 3. slay | c. style, especially for clothing |
| 4. drip | d. charisma or charm |
| 5. sus | e. a lie or to lie or exaggerate |
| 6. fire | f. do something very well |

2 Key words

a. Choose the correct word to match each definition below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

- a feeling or quality that surrounds a person or place and is noticeable
a. zeitgeist b. cosmic c. aura
- the powerful quality some people have to attract, impress or influence other people
a. charisma b. mediate c. karma
- change the way that an organisation, company or product is seen by the public
a. overshare b. rebrand c. honour code
- tell people too much personal information about yourself
a. tongue-in-cheek b. overshare c. superficial
- the study of the movements and positions of the sun, moon, planets and stars in the belief that they affect people's lives and character
a. aura b. karma c. astrology
- connected with the whole universe, or something of extremely large size
a. cosmic b. astrology c. virtue
- the general mood of a particular period of history, seen through the ideas, beliefs etc common at the time
a. virtue b. zeitgeist c. self-worth

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8. the force produced by a person's actions in one life that influences what happens to them
 - a. karma
 - b. self-worth
 - c. aura
9. something not intended seriously; something done or said as a joke
 - a. offset
 - b. superficial
 - c. tongue-in-cheek
10. a system in which people are trusted to behave well and obey rules
 - a. honour code
 - b. offset
 - c. virtue
11. behaviour or attitudes that show high moral standards
 - a. virtue
 - b. honour code
 - c. overshare
12. not studying or looking at something carefully or completely; seeing only what is obvious
 - a. karma
 - b. superficial
 - c. aura
13. use one cost, payment or situation in order to cancel or reduce the effect of another
 - a. rebrand
 - b. mediate
 - c. offset
14. a feeling of confidence in yourself that you are a good and useful person
 - a. charisma
 - b. honor code
 - c. self-worth
15. try to end a situation between people or groups who disagree by talking to them and trying to find things that everyone can agree on
 - a. mediate
 - b. offset
 - c. virtue

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. That company is _____ – so they're redoing their logo and developing a new marketing campaign.
2. There is debate about whether carbon credits really _____ pollution or not.
3. My friend went to a special photographer to get a picture of her _____. It shows the energy around her as bands of colour.
4. I unfollowed her because she _____ on social media. It was simply too much!
5. HR held several meetings to _____ the problem between the two colleagues.
6. Don't be so _____.! It's what's on the inside that counts.
7. It's hard looking for a new job. Try not to let the rejection affect your _____.
8. Which presidential candidate do you think has the most onscreen _____?
9. I wonder how social media will be remembered as part of the _____ of this era.
10. Many universities have a(n) _____ or pledge that students follow for academic honesty.

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Young people are evaluating good and bad life decisions on a scale and seeking input from others. To philosophy experts, it sounds familiar

Alaina Demopoulos

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- 1 You can count calories, steps, streams of your favourite song – and now, you can assign a number to how cool you are. See: aura points, a way to calculate your rizz. (That’s what the kids call ‘charisma’, and if you didn’t know that, you just lost 100 aura points.)
- 2 Ask someone out and get a yes? That’s 100 aura points for you. Still on Snapchat past the age of 19? Gross and suspect ... dock 1,000 aura points. Confidently answered a question in class, but got it wrong? You’re in the red now.
- 3 Or so the TikToks that explain the idea go. According to the *Wall Street Journal’s* report on the trend, posts on the app with the hashtag #aurapoints jumped 378 per cent from May to June. “When you have a really, really, really good aura, I feel like that really translates from online to the other side of the phone,” Hina Sabatine, a 27-year-old Los Angeles content creator said. “Some people just have it.”
- 4 Yes, the elusive “it” quality, first used to describe liberated silent-screen icons such as Clara Bow and Evelyn Nesbit, gets a rebrand for the under-30s. Rack up aura points, and you’re part of the cool-kid club. Lose them at your peril.
- 5 On TikTok, young people share instances in which they earned, or lost, points. Winning aura points typically comes from acting in a breezy and unbothered but self-confident way. For example, you’ll get points for moving on quickly from a break-up and not messily oversharing the dirty details with friends. But stay with a cheater, and that’s minus 100 points – anyone who has aura would never put up with that.
- 6 It’s not a very serious system. Still, some creators use it to help describe dramatic moments of growth. One woman said she gained aura points when she “stepped aside from my bf’s casket when his ex showed up so she could have closure too” – a moment of solidarity during an unimaginable time that indicates maturity, kindness and girl power.
- 7 A recent graduate said that she “bawled” when her father, whom she had not seen or spoken to in five years, showed up out of nowhere to her ceremony to say that he loved her. “How many aura points did I lose?” she asked, sparking a discussion on absent fathers in the comment section.
- 8 For Julian Baggini, a philosopher and co-founder of the *Philosophers’ Magazine* (and *Guardian* contributor), aura points fall in line with Gen Z’s reported love of astrology and other cosmic belief systems. “There is this kind of zeitgeist surrounding karma and energy right now, which is why they phrase it in terms of aura,” he said. “It’s tongue-in-cheek, and it also seems to be a sort of weird contemporary honour code.”
- 9 Aura points might seem like a new TikTok phenomenon, but some philosophers say elements of the trend come from ancient history. “This is in line with what’s known as virtue ethics, which emerged from Aristotle and is popular in Greek and Roman philosophy,” said Ellie Anderson, an assistant professor of philosophy at Pomona College and co-host of the *Overthink* podcast. This theory on how to live a moral life places emphasis on the quality of a person’s character, rather than how well they follow rules or a higher power.
- 10 “This trend is about people thinking about whether or not their everyday life is matching up to an idea,” Anderson said. “It encourages us to speak with others about what we’re doing in life, and whether or not it’s good. Even though aura points track a cool factor, it doesn’t seem like it’s doing that in a purely superficial sense.”

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- 11 Paul Blaschko, an assistant teaching professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, compares aura points to moral credit, or the idea that every “good” action or decision a person makes can potentially offset future “bad” ones. “These concepts are a way of talking about status, of using a gamified system to make a particular judgment on someone’s action, and inviting people in the comments to critique you,” Blaschko added.
- 12 The philosopher Alain de Botton described “status anxiety” as “anxiety about what others think of us; about whether we’re judged a success or a failure, a winner or a loser”. Blaschko sees some of this in aura points. “We’re constantly asking this question about our own self-worth, and it’s mediated by how we think others will perceive us, and aura points let us negotiate this with other people,” he said. “Users are inviting others to critique them but also being a part of that transaction of status through posting their opinions.”
- 13 Understanding the philosophy behind a simple TikTok trend? That’s 1,000 aura points for you.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What is the new way to calculate your charisma?
2. What percentage did hashtag #aurapoints jump from May to June?
3. What is an example from the article of a way to gain aura points?
4. What is an example from the article of a way to lose aura points?
5. According to Baggini, what does this trend "fall in line" with?
6. How do aura points seem to connect to ancient history and philosophy?
7. Which philosopher is associated with that philosophy?
8. What does Professor Blaschko compare aura points to?
9. What is "status anxiety" as described by Alain de Botton?
10. How do aura points help us negotiate how others will perceive us, according to Professor Blaschko?

4 Key language

a. Tick all the words that collocate with the verbs in bold.

1. You can **count** _____.
 points
 calories
 aura
 steps
2. You can **share** _____.
 instances
 peril
 experiences
 details

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3. You can **place** _____.

- emphasis
- blame
- a phenomenon
- an order

4. You can **invite** _____.

- status
- feedback
- others
- participation

b. Choose one of the collocations for each verb above. Write a sentence for each one.

1. (count)
2. (share)
3. (place)
4. (invite)

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "All human actions have one or more of these seven causes: chance, nature, compulsions, habit, reason, passion, desire." – Aristotle
- "Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do." – Potter Stewart

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6 In your own words

a. Do some research about a current trend on social media. Answer these questions.

- What is the trend about?
- What is/are the hashtag(s) associated with this trend?
- What are the "rules" of the trend?
- How would you describe this trend?
- What is a trend you wish would gain/lose popularity?

b. Report your findings to the class and share the facts you learned, as well as your opinions. Here are some phrases to help you show emphasis during your report.

- especially
- particularly
- most importantly
- above all
- undeniably