**Everything You Wanted to Know About TIME’s Person of the Year**

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http://time.com/3626016/person-of-the-year-faq/

**TIME’s Deputy Managing Editor Radhika Jones answers your questions about how the choice is made, how editors keep it a secret and why inanimate objects are eligible**

**How long has Person of the Year been around**?

It has a great origin story—or maybe more of a legend. At the end of 1927, the editors of TIME looked at the year’s covers and realized they had somehow failed to put Charles Lindbergh on the cover. He’d done his historic flight in May, but no cover. They decided they could get away with putting him on the cover months later by calling him “Man of the Year.” It was a stopgap. And here we are 87 years later. The challenge is that on one hand, we’re trying to make a decision about who best represents the news of the year. But the pick also needs to have archival value. You need the sense that it will stand the test of time. So ideally, we want our Person of the Year to be both a snapshot of where the world is and a picture of where it’s going. Someone, or in rare cases, something, that feels like a force of history.

**Tell me about the ‘for better or worse’ caveat that’s often attached to Person of the Year.**

The criterion is “the person or persons who most affected the news and our lives, for good or ill, and embodied what was important about the year.” A lot of news is bad news and a lot of people who make bad news are very powerful people. TIME’s editors aren’t immune to that reality. Famously, they named Hitler in 1938 and Stalin in 1939 and again in 1942. These were men who had a huge impact, not just in those years but over the entire century. It’s easy to stand by those choices, looking back. Arguably you could do a bad guy every year and be justified.

**Earth isn’t a person and neither is the personal computer. What’s the deal with these inanimate objects?**

It’s a good question. What I hear anecdotally is that readers are most satisfied when the Person of the Year is a person. Sometimes it’s been a thing; sometimes it’s been a collective. In 2011, it was [The Protester](http://www.time.com/time/person-of-the-year/2011/), a sort of representative figure. We thought long and hard about that. Could we execute it in a way that would be satisfying? Would people understand what we were trying to say? We decided that we could, and they would. I think the personal computer really stands up. Although Steve Jobs was profiled for that issue, and you could argue the editors might have been more forward-looking had they named Steve Jobs for that year, 1982.

**Is that something you hear a lot? Why wasn’t Steve Jobs ever Person of the Year?**

Definitely, particularly the year he died. To me the optimal year would have been 1984, when the first Mac came out. The 1984 Person of the Year was Peter Ueberroth, who ran the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. Looking back, it’s easy to judge, but that would have been a good year for Steve.

**Has the Person of the Year ever been someone who is deceased?**

No. But nowhere is it written that it couldn’t be.

**How secretive is the process of putting together the issue?**

It’s a really fun journalistic property and I think a lot of fun leaks out of it if people have a sense of who it’s going to be. We have runners-up in the issue, so there are a number of stories in the mix each year, and we have to stay flexible, given the nature of the news. Very few people on the staff know who the front-runner is, or even the short list. Really only the people for whom it’s necessary to know, know — including a small circle of editors and the writer working on the story. Layout meetings are held in secret. This is my fifth year editing it and I’ve developed a good poker face.