**Feeling Words with Latin Roots**

**Vol - to wish; to will; to want**

Let’s start with a word we all know: volunteer.

* A **volunteer** is someone who acts upon his or her own desires or **volition.**
* A volunteer is not forced and does not require money to motivate his or her actions.
* So, words with **vol- inevitably involve wishes and desires,** otherwise known as feelings. Keep reading to see examples of vol- combined with other roots to form some common test words, such as benevolent, malevolent, and others.

**Bene - kindness; goodness**

Words you know that start with bene - are always good. (This lesson will **benefit** you. It will be **beneficial**.) So, what does it mean if you are **benevolent?** You guessed it: You have kind wishes toward others.

Here is a list of some other **bene - words:**

* **benediction (n.)**—an expression of kindness; a blessing
* **benefactor (n.)**—one who performs an act of kindness
* **beneficent (adj.)**—performing acts of charity
* **beneficiary (n.)**—one who receives a benefit
* **benign (adj.)**—kind and gentle

**Mal - bad; ill; wrong**

* If you recall the villain **Maleficent** from the animated version of Sleeping Beauty (or the more recent Angelina Jolie film), this root will be an easy enough one to remember.
* Maleficent is not just a nasty-sounding name; it is an adjective used to describe anyone who is harmful or **malicious** in intent.
* In medicine, what do doctors mean when they call a tumor benign? They don’t mean the tumor is nice and gentle; rather, a **benign tumor** is simply “not harmful.”
* Q: What do doctors call a harmful tumor? A **Malignant** Tumor

Let’s go back to our good friend vol-. If benevolent means having kind wishes toward others, then what does malevolent mean? Yes, you’re right: having bad wishes toward others.

Here are some other mal- words:

* **maladapted (adj.)**—not adapted well to the environment
* **malaise (n.)**—a general sense of unease
* **malcontent (adj.)**—dissatisfied (not content); (n.)—a person who is not content
* **malfeasance (n.)**—misconduct
* **malice (n.)**—a desire to harm others
* **malpractice (n.)**—harmful actions, especially by a doctor or lawyer

**ambi - both; changing**

Ever wish you were **ambidextrous?** You probably know that this word refers to someone who is equally skilled with both hands. So, ambi means “both” or “the ability to change.” (And **dexterous** means “skillful with one’s hands.” We can tell you’re getting the hang of this!) What does it mean to be **ambivalent?** To have two or more conflicting emotions.

If you have sharp eyes, you may have noticed that **that’s val-**, ***not vol*** -. Not to worry. Sometimes the spellings of roots can change, but the meaning is still the same.

Sounds Like: “Before Thought” In legal jargon, “**malice** **aforethought**” means the commission of a crime with a premeditated intention of causing harm. (It also sounds like a line from Shakespeare, but it’s not.)

Another important ambi- word you absolutely need to know is **ambiguous:**

* When her mother asked her if she had completed her homework, Emily gave an ambiguous reply.
* Even after a thorough police investigation, the identity of the shoplifter remained ambiguous.

Based on these contexts, we can define **ambiguous** as unclear in meaning, confusing, or capable of being interpreted in different ways.

**Equi - equal; voc - speaking**

While we’re on the subject of vagueness, let’s look at a word that means almost the same thing: **equivocal.**

**Equivocal** is made up of two important roots: equi- and voc-. You have seen both of these roots before in simple words such as **equal** and **vocal**. So, literally, being **equivocal** means “saying two things equally.” In other words, you’re being ambiguous with the intention of misleading others, or you’re being hesitant about making a commitment.

* The politician would often **equivocate** when asked about a controversial issue.
* Samantha told James **unequivocally** that she would never go to the prom with him.

Equi - (or equa-) and voc - can be found in a number of English words. Here are a few important ones to remember:

* **advocate (n.)**—a person who argues in favor of a position or cause;
  + **(v.)**—to argue in favor of a position or cause
* **equanimity (n.)**—staying calm and even-tempered (an “equal” mood)
* **equation (n.)**—a statement asserting the equality of two expressions
* **equidistant (adj.)**—equally distant
* **equilateral (adj.)**—sharing equal sides
* **equitable (adj.)**—fair and just (“equally” treated)
* **evoke (v.)**—to call forth
* **invoke (v.)**—to call upon a higher power
* **irrevocable (adj.)**—something that cannot be stopped (or “called” back)
* **provoke (v.)**—to cause, especially by speaking words (The adjective is provocative, which means “causing discussion, thought, emotion, or excitement in some way.”)
* **vociferate (v.)**—to speak loudly
* **vociferous (adj.)**—talking a lot or loudly

Horse Whisperer? Sometimes words look like they contain a certain root word, but, in fact, do not.

Take the word **equine,** for example. It appears to start with equi-, but it is actually derived from a ***different Latin root, equus***, which pertains to horses. But don’t worry. At least 90% of the time, your knowledge of roots will not steer you wrong.

**Plac - to calm or please**

Ever hear of Lake **Placid** in the state of New York? How about a **placebo** medicine? You may be wondering what in the world these things have in common. Well, they both start with plac-, our next important root.

Lake Placid is calm and gentle, and a placebo medicine may make you feel calm and healed, though it actually provides no medicinal value. Here are some other important plac- words:

**complacent (adj.)**—satisfied with the current situation and uninterested in change

**complaisant (adj.)**—having a desire to please others

**implacable (adj.)**—impossible to calm or soothe

**placate (v.)**—to calm or soothe We’ve learned a lot of words and word roots so far. Do you need to memorize them all?

**Complacent vs. Complaisant**

Complacent and complaisant are obviously visually similar and are pronounced identically. As you can see, however, they have slightly different meanings. (English is cruel!) Test writers are far more likely to test you on complacent, so remember this when you’re studying!

**Practice Exercises:**

Fill in the blank with the word from this chapter that best completes the meaning of the sentence.

1. Lake \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ derives its name from its smooth, glassy surface and the soothing mountain air in its environment.

2. A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ person wishes harm on others.

3. Since Robert was an only child, he was the sole \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to his father’s estate.

4. You should not act based on the wishes of others. Act on your own \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

5. The crying baby was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; no amount of rocking could console her.

6. Alex was a passionate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for the rights of animals.

7. If three sides of a triangle are equal, the triangle is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

8. Since their teacher was so \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, the students could rarely get a word in edgewise.

9. Many minority groups in America have fought to achieve rights \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to that of the

majority population.

10. The unqualified lawyer was often sued for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Multiple Choice Read each question and choose the best answer of the options given.

Question 1 is based on the passage below.

The doctor packed his instruments and left Keswick manor, stepping into the cool grey of a London morning. As he passed Whitehouse Street, his lip curled, and his pace quickened. Here were the shabby offices of his nominal peers, **untrained nurses and midwives**, mostly, although the doctor thought of the gulf between him and them as large as that between the captain of an ocean liner and the oarsman of one of the small rowboats that scurry across the Thames.

1. The doctor’s attitude towards the “nurses and midwives” is best described as

A) ambivalent

B) malcontent

C) placid

D) vociferous

2. The tour guide was known for both his \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and his \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_: frequently kind, he was also calm and self-assured.

A) beneficence…equanimity

B) malfeasance…placability

C) complacence…equidistance

D) malignity…dexterity

3. Given the gravity of his offenses, the convicted executive displayed astonishing \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ when he addressed the court before sentencing.

A) invocation

B) malpractice

C) volition

D) placidity

Question 4 is based on the passage below.

Pull up to a traffic light in Anytown, U.S.A. and look around. On one side sits an army of national chain stores and “family friendly” restaurants, with names designed to **evoke** memories of small-town Americana.

4. In context, “evoke” most nearly means

A) shout

B) speak quietly

C) equal

D) recall

5. During the Sunday church sermon, the pastor \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the name of Jesus Christ several times.

A) provoked

B) invoked

C) evoked

D) advocated

Words in Context

Read each passage and determine the meaning of the words in bold based on the context of the paragraph.

The human body is not an ideal model of biological efficiency; it is more like a garbage dump. Buried deep within the genetic code of all humans is the unfortunate record, the genetic “trash,” of our less successful evolutionary cousins and ancestors. Consider haemoglobin. Modern human haemoglobin consists of four different protein chains known as globins. Many of the genes that could produce globins are **redundant,** and several others are inactive, damaged in such a way as to make protein production impossible.

What is the significance of these **dysfunctional** genes? Quite simply, these damaged genes are the legacy of our less successful ancestors, the biological **remnants** of evolutionary **mutations** that didn’t work out well enough.

1. redundant

2. dysfunctional

3. remnant

4. mutation

While many rivers have long been **utilized** and harnessed by the people who **congregate** near them, the Mekong River, though it snakes through five countries in Southeast Asia, has **eluded** human control until recent times. The low water level in dry seasons **impedes** travel down the river, as does the Mekong’s habit of splitting into wide networks of smaller channels. Annual flooding during the monsoon season **thwarts** attempts at long-term agriculture. But in recent years, modern technology and **burgeoning** human populations have begun to **encroach** upon the Mekong’s independence. Soon, the Mekong may be as readily **manipulated** as many of its peers around the world.

5. utilize

6. congregate

7. elude

8. impede

9. thwart

10. burgeoning

11. encroach

12. manipulate

Puzzle – Try this as test of your word knowledge.

1. a blessing

2. one who performs an act of kindness

3. a general sense of unease

4. equally skilled with both hands

5. vague, unclear

6. to deliberately mislead or confuse

7. to speak or act on someone else’s behalf

8. to cause

9. unable to be stopped

10. to call upon a higher power