

MERRIAM-WEBSTER'S ROOTS TO WORD MASTERY

INTRODUCTION

If you're like many students today preparing for the SSAT or ISEE, you probably have never taken a course in Latin, which means you may never have learned how most English words came to be based on words from older languages. And you may never have realized how the study of word roots can lead to a much larger vocabulary than you now have. Studying and mastering vocabulary words will certainly improve your verbal score. So to maximize your chances of scoring high on your test, this chapter will set you on the path to learning a broad range of new vocabulary words.

You'll learn 50 of the Greek and Latin roots that form the foundation of most of the words in the English language as well as 150 English words based on those roots. Many of these 150 words will actually lead you to several more words each. By learning the word *credible*, you'll also understand *credibly* and *credibility* the next time you hear them; by learning *gratify*, you'll also learn *gratifying* and *gratification*; and by learning *theology*, you'll understand *theological*, *theologically*, and *theologian* when you run across them. So learning the roots and words in this chapter will help you to learn thousands of words!

Ancient Greek and Latin have been the sources of most words in the English language. (The third-biggest source is the family of Germanic languages.) And not just of the older words: Almost the entire English vocabulary was created long after the fall of the Roman empire, and it continues to expand to this day. Of the new words that are constantly being invented, the majority—especially those in the sciences, where most new words are introduced—are still based on Greek and Latin roots. Even new buzzwords that you think appear out of nowhere may be Greek or Latin in origin. For instance, *morph* is a short form of *metamorphose*, which comes almost straight from Latin; *def* is short for *definitely*, which is also based on Latin; *hype* is probably short for *hyperbole*, which comes straight from Greek; and *rad* is short for *radical*, which comes from the Latin *radix*—which actually means “root”!

Besides improved test scores, what can you expect to gain from expanding your vocabulary?

For more vocabulary-building exercises, visit Merriam-Webster's Web site at www.m-w.com.

A large vocabulary will allow you to read a wider range of writing than you had previously, and in the process, it will broaden your range of interests. If you've always limited your leisure reading to magazines about rock musicians and film stars, or cars and sports, or clothing and style, or fantasy and electronic games, you'll soon discover that newsweeklies, biographies, literary fiction, nature writing, or history can give you more pleasure and expand your mind at the same time.

Just as important, you'll find that a larger vocabulary will help you express your ideas more clearly. It will encourage you to describe, say, a film or a musician with more informative words than "really good" or "cool" or "awesome," and it will give you more precise ways to talk about, say, a news story, a mental state, a new building, or a person's face—in fact, almost any aspect of everyday life.

But it will also help make you more competent in your chosen career. According to research studies, people with large vocabularies are far more likely to be found in the most important and interesting and desirable jobs.

Let's suppose you want to become a doctor, nurse, or pharmacist. Doctors today prescribe thousands of drugs and treat thousands of identified medical conditions. Many of these drugs and conditions have long and complex names, almost all of which are derived from Greek and Latin. In your chosen career, you'd naturally want to have memorized as many of these names as possible. But since most of us don't have perfect memories, having a good grasp of Greek and Latin roots is the best way to be sure your memory is jogged whenever you come across a long medical or pharmaceutical term. Knowing a single Latin suffix or prefix (many short word endings are called suffixes, and many short word beginnings are called prefixes) or a root can prepare you to understand hundreds of words in which it appears. For instance, since the suffix *-itis* means "disease" or "inflammation," seeing a word with that ending (*gastroenteritis*, *nephritis*, *phlebitis*, etc.) will let you identify at once the class of words to which it belongs. *Hemo-* means "blood," so *hemophilia*, *hemoglobinopathy*, *hemorrhagic fever*, and *hemolytic anemia* are all conditions involving the blood. And let's not forget the middles of words. In *gastroenteritis*, the root *-enter-* refers to the intestines.

As you can see, many words contain more than one root. A single word may be a mix of Greek and Latin and even Germanic roots or elements, and a long scientific term may contain four or more elements. Such complex words are much less common in ordinary vocabulary, but even a conversation between elementary-school children will contain many words based on classical roots.

In a technical field, mastering a technical vocabulary may be a requirement for your job. But a broad nontechnical vocabulary can be

highly valuable as well. Even in a narrowly focused field such as accounting or computer programming, a large vocabulary can prove to be of real practical value. And in a field such as law, which tends to get involved in many aspects of life, a large general vocabulary can turn out to be very advantageous.

While root study is very valuable, be cautious when you begin exploring it. A portion of a word may resemble a root only by coincidence. For example, the word *center* doesn't have anything to do with the root *cent* (meaning "hundred"), and the words *interest* and *interminable* don't have anything to do with the root *inter* (meaning "between"). It may take time to recognize which words actually contain the roots you think you see in them. Another problem is that not every root you think you've identified will necessarily be the right one. For example, *ped* may mean either "foot" or "child," and *liber* may mean either "book" or "free." A third problem is that many common roots are too short to recognize or change their spelling in a confusing way from word to word. So even though *perception*, *deceive*, *recipe*, *capture*, and *receipt* can all be traced to the same Latin root, the root changes form so much—*cip*, *cept*, *cap*, etc.—that root study probably won't help the student looking for a memory aid. Similarly, when the Latin word *ad* (meaning "to" or "toward") becomes a prefix, it usually changes to *ac-*, *ad-*, *af-*, *ag-*, *am-*, *an-*, or some other form, so the student can rarely recognize it. In addition, the meanings of some roots can change from word to word. So even though the *cip-cept-cap* root means "grasp," "seize," or "take," it may seem to change its meaning completely when combined with a prefix (*per-*, *de-*, etc.).

As long as you are aware of such difficulties, root study is an excellent way to learn English vocabulary (not to mention the vocabularies of Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese, all of which are based on Latin). In fact, it's the *only* method of vocabulary acquisition that relies on broadly useful memory aids. Without it, vocabulary study consists of nothing but trying to memorize unrelated words one by one by one.

So from here on, it's up to you. The more fun you can have learning your new vocabulary, the better you'll do. And it *can* be fun. For one thing, the results are instantaneous—you can show off your new knowledge any time you want. And you'll almost feel your mind expanding as your vocabulary expands. This is why people talk about the "power" of a large vocabulary; you'll soon realize your mental capacities are actually becoming more powerful with every new word.

Take every opportunity to use the words you're learning; the most effective way to keep a new word alive in your vocabulary is to use it regularly. Look and listen for the new words you've learned—you'll be surprised to find yourself running into them often, especially

if you've also begun reading more demanding books and magazines in your leisure time. Challenge your friends with them, even if just in a joking way. Make up games to test yourself, maybe using homemade flash cards.

And don't stop acquiring new vocabulary words after you've mastered this chapter. Whenever you're reading, look for roots in the new words you keep encountering and try to guess each word's meaning before looking it up in a dictionary (which you should try to keep close at hand). Once you've acquired the habit, you'll be astonished at how quickly your vocabulary will grow.

INSTRUCTIONS

On the following pages, we introduce you to 50 of the most useful Greek and Latin roots (omitting the prefixes and suffixes that almost everyone knows—*anti-*, *co-*, *de-*, *-ism*, *mis-*, *non-*, *un-*, *vice-*, etc.). We call these roots useful because they are common and also because they nearly always keep their meaning in an obvious way when they appear in an English word. So if you encounter an unfamiliar word on your test, these roots may be the key to making an educated guess as to its meaning.

Each root is discussed in a short paragraph. Each paragraph is followed by three vocabulary words derived from the root. For each word, we provide the pronunciation, the definition, and a sentence showing how the word might actually be used in writing or conversation.

You'll be quizzed after every 15 words, and finally you'll be tested on every one of the 150 words. (All answers are given at the end of the chapter.) These tests will ensure that the words and roots become permanently fixed in your memory, just as if you'd been drilled on them in class.

For further study on your own, near the end of the chapter we list an additional 50 useful roots, along with three English words based on each one.

50 ROOTS TO SUCCESS

Pronunciation Guide: \ə\ abut \ər\ further \a\ ash \ā\ ace \ā\ mop, mar
 \au\ out \ch\ chin \e\ bet \ē\ easy \g\ go \i\ hit \ī\ ice \j\ job \î\ sing
 \ō\ go \ò\ law \ǎ\ boy \th\ thin \th\ the \ü\ loot \ù\ foot \y\ yet
 \zh\ vision

agr Beginning Latin students traditionally learn the word *agricola*, meaning “farmer,” in their very first class. Though most of us tend to think of the Romans as soldiers, senators, and citizens of the city of Rome, most inhabitants of the empire were actually farmers. We see the root today in words such as **agriculture**.

agronomy \ə-ˈgrä-n@-mē\ A branch of agriculture dealing with field-crop production and soil management.

- The poor country was in dire need of an agronomy team to introduce its farmers to new crops and techniques.

agrochemical \µa-grō-ˈke-mi-k@l\ An agricultural chemical (such as an herbicide or an insecticide).

- The river’s pollution was easily traced to the runoff of agrochemicals from the cornfields.

agrarian \ə-ˈgrer-ē-@n\ Of or relating to fields, lands, or farmers, or characteristic of farming life.

- The team of sharply dressed lawyers seemed nervous and awkward in this agrarian landscape of silos and feed stores.

ante *Ante* means “before”; its opposite, *post*, means “after.” Both almost always appear as prefixes (that is, at the beginnings of words). *Ante* is easy to confuse with *anti*, meaning “against.” **Antebellum** means “before the war,” and we often speak of the antebellum South—that is, the South before the Civil War, not the “antiwar” South.

antedate \ˈan-ti-µdāt\ 1: To date as of a date prior to that of execution. 2: To precede in time.

- It appeared that Crowley had antedated his check to the contractors, helping them evade taxes for work done in the new year.

antecedent \µan-t@-ˈsē-d@nt\ Prior, preceding.

- As Mrs. Perkins told it, the scuffle had started spontaneously, and any antecedent events involving her rowdy son had been forgotten.

anterior \an-ˈtir-ē-@r\ Situated before or toward the front.

- Dr. Singh was going on about anterior and posterior knee pain, but in her agony Karen could hardly remember a word.

anthro The Latin *anthro* means “man” or “mankind.” Thus, in English we call the study of mankind **anthropology**. *Anthro* is very close to the Greek and Latin *andro*, which shows up in such words as **android**.

anthropoid \ˈan-thr@-μpoid\ Any of several large, tailless apes.

- The anthropoids—chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, orangutans, and gibbons—had diverged from the human evolutionary line by 5 million years ago.

misanthrope \ˈmi-s@n-μthrōp\ A person who hates or distrusts mankind.

- Over the years she had retreated into an increasingly bitter solitude, and her former friends now dismissed her as a misanthrope.

philanthropy \f@-ˈlan-thr@-pē\ Active effort to promote human welfare.

- His philanthropy was so welcome that no one cared to inquire how he’d come by his fortune.

aqu The Greek and Latin root *aqu-* refers to water. The ancient world regarded all matter as made up of four elements—earth, air, fire, and water. Today, the root is found in such familiar words as **aquarium**, **aquatic**, and **aquamarine**.

aquaculture \ˈä-kw@-μk@l-ch@r\ The cultivation of the natural produce of water, such as fish or shellfish.

- Having grown hugely, the aquaculture industry now produces 30 percent of the world’s seafood.

aquifer \ˈa-kw@-f@r\ A water-bearing stratum of rock, sand, or gravel.

- The vast Ogallala aquifer, which irrigates most of the Great Plains, is monitored constantly to ensure that it isn’t dangerously depleted.

Aquarius \@-ˈkwar-ē-@s\ 1: A constellation south of Pegasus pictured as a man pouring water. 2: The 11th sign of the zodiac in astrology.

- Many believe that the great Age of Aquarius began in 1962; others believe it commenced in 2000 or hasn’t yet begun.

arti This root comes from the Latin word for “skill.” *Art* could also mean simply “cleverness,” and we still describe a clever solution as **artful**. Until recent centuries, almost no one made a real distinction between skilled craftsmanship and what we would now call **art**. So the words **artistic** and **artificial** turn out to be very closely related.

artifice \ˈär-t@-f@s\ 1: Clever skill. 2: A clever trick.

- She was stunned to find she’d been deceived by a masterpiece of artifice—the lifelike figure of a seated man talking on the phone, a lit cigarette in his right hand.

artifact \ˈär-ti-μfakt\ A usually simple object, such as a tool or ornament, made by human workmanship.

- Among the artifacts carried by the 5,000-year-old Iceman was a fur quiver with fourteen arrow shafts.

artisan \ˈar-t@-z@n\ A skilled worker or craftsman.

- Ducking down an alley, he weaved quickly through the artisans hawking their wares of handworked brass and leather.

Quiz 1

Answers appear at the end of this chapter.

1. Carnegie spread his _____ more widely than any previous American, building almost 1,700 libraries.
2. A long list of _____ s—mainly herbicides and pesticides—were identified as health threats.
3. News of the cave's discovery soon leaked out, and local youths were soon plundering it of its Indian _____ s.
4. Stalin moved swiftly to uproot Russia's _____ traditions and substitute his new vision of collectivized agriculture.
5. They had drilled down 85 feet before they struck the _____ and water bubbled to the surface.
6. The first X-ray image, labeled “ _____,” showed a frontal view of her heart.
7. George Washington Carver, a hero of American _____, transformed Southern agriculture through his research into the peanut.
8. The throne itself, its surface glittering with ornaments, was the most extravagant example of the sculptor's _____.
9. In his lecture on “The _____ Causes of the Irish Famine,” he expressed wonder at rural Ireland's absolute dependency on the potato by 1840.

10. Before the development of _____, the Atlantic salmon was threatened by overfishing.
11. Her brother, always suspicious and unfriendly, was by now a genuine _____, who left his phone unplugged and refused all invitations.
12. Any contracts that _____ the new law by five years or more will remain in effect.
13. The man resembled an _____, with powerful sloping shoulders and arms that seemed to brush the ground.
14. A young boy pouring water into the basin below reminded her of the astrological symbol of _____.
15. All the handcrafts turned out to be the work of a large family of _____s.