

SESSION 2

ORIGINS AND RELATED WORDS

Every word in the English language has a history—and these ten are no exception. In this section you will learn a good deal more about the words you have been working with; in addition, you will make excursions into many other words allied either in meaning, form, or history to our basic ten.

1. the ego

Egoist and *egotist* are built on the same Latin root—the pronoun *ego*, meaning *I*. *I* is the greatest concern in the *egoist's* mind, the most overused word in the *egotist's* vocabulary. (Keep the

words differentiated in your own mind by thinking of the *t* in *talk*, and the additional *t* in *egotist*.) *Ego* itself has been taken over from Latin as an important English word and is commonly used to denote one's concept of oneself, as in, "What do you think your constant criticisms do to my *ego*?" *Ego* has also a special meaning in psychology—but for the moment you have enough problems without going into *that*.

If you are an *egocentric* (ee'-gō-SEN'-trik), you consider yourself the *center* of the universe—you are an extreme form of the *egoist*. And if you are an *egomaniac* (ee'-gō-MAY'-nee-ak), you carry *egoism* to such an extreme that your needs, desires, and interests have become a morbid obsession, a *mania*. The *egoist* or *egotist* is obnoxious, the *egocentric* is intolerable, and the *egomaniac* is dangerous and slightly mad.

Egocentric is both a noun ("What an *egocentric* her new roommate is!") and an adjective ("He is the most *egocentric* person I have ever met!").

To derive the adjective form of *egomaniac*, add *-al*, a common adjective suffix. Say the adjective aloud:

egomaniacal ee'-gō-mə-NĪ'-ə-kəl

2. others

In Latin, the word for *other* is *alter*, and a number of valuable English words are built on this root.

Altruism (AL'-trōō-iz-əm), the philosophy practiced by *altruists*, comes from one of the variant spellings of Latin *alter*, *other*. *Altruistic* (al-trōō-IS'-tik) actions look toward the benefit of *others*. If you *alternate* (AWL'-tər-nayt'), you skip one and take the *other*, so to speak, as when you play golf on *alternate* (AWL'-tər-nət) Saturdays.

An *alternate* (AWL'-tər-nət) in a debate, contest, or convention is the *other* person who will take over if the original choice is unable to attend. And if you have no *alternative* (awl-TUR'-nə-tiv), you have no *other* choice.

You see how easy it is to understand the meanings of these words once you realize that they all come from the same source.

And keeping in mind that *alter* means *other*, you can quickly understand words like *alter ego*, *altercation*, and *alteration*.

An *alteration* (awl'-tə-RAY'-shən) is of course a change—a making into something *other*. When you *alter* (AWL'-tər) your plans, you make *other* plans.

An *altercation* (awl'-tər-KAY'-shən) is a verbal dispute. When you have an *altercation* with someone, you have a violent disagreement, a “fight” with words. And why? Because you have *other* ideas, plans, or opinions than those of the person on the *other* side of the argument. *Altercation*, by the way, is stronger than *quarrel* or *dispute*—the sentiment is more heated, the disagreement is likely to be angry or even hot-tempered, there may be recourse, if the disputants are human, to profanity or obscenity. You have *altercations*, in short, over pretty important issues, and the word implies that you get quite excited.

Alter ego (AWL'-tər EE'-gō), which combines *alter*, *other*, with *ego*, I, self, generally refers to someone with whom you are so close that you both do the same things, think alike, react similarly, and are, in temperament, almost mirror images of each other. Any such friend is your *other I*, your *other self*, your *alter ego*.

USING THE WORDS

Can you pronounce the words?

Digging a little into the derivation of three of our basic words, *egoist*, *egotist*, and *altruist*, has put us in touch with two important Latin roots, *ego*, I, self, and *alter*, other, and has made it possible for us to explore, with little difficulty, many other words derived from these roots. Pause now, for a moment, to digest these new acquisitions, and to say them *aloud*.

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| 1. <i>ego</i> | EE'-gō |
| 2. <i>egocentric</i> | ee-gō-SEN'-trik |
| 3. <i>egomaniac</i> | ee-gō-MAY'-nee-ak |
| 4. <i>egomaniacal</i> | ee'-gō-mə-NĪ'-ə-kəl |

5. <i>altruism</i>	AL'-trōō-iz-əm
6. <i>altruistic</i>	al-trōō-IS'-tik
7. to <i>alternate</i> (v.)	AWL'-tər-nayt'
8. <i>alternate</i> (adj. or noun)	AWL'-tər-nət
9. <i>alternative</i>	awl-TUR'-nə-tiv
10. <i>alteration</i>	awl'-tər-AY'-shən
11. to <i>alter</i>	AWL'-tər
12. <i>altercation</i>	awl'-tər-KAY'-shən
13. <i>alter ego</i>	AWL'-tər EE'-gō

Can you work with the words? (I)

You have seen how these thirteen words derive from the two Latin roots *ego*, I, self, and *alter*, other, and you have pronounced them aloud and thereby begun to make them part of your active vocabulary.

Are you ready to match definitions to words?

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|-----------------|---|
| 1. ego | a. one who is excessively fixated on his own desires, needs, etc. |
| 2. egocentric | b. to change |
| 3. altruism | c. argument |
| 4. to alternate | d. one's concept of oneself |
| 5. to alter | e. to take one, skip one, etc. |
| 6. altercation | f. philosophy of putting another's welfare above one's own |

KEY: 1-d, 2-a, 3-f, 4-e, 5-b, 6-c

Can you work with the words? (II)

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|----------------|--|
| 1. egomaniacal | a. a change |
| 2. altruistic | b. other possible |
| 3. alternative | c. interested in the welfare of others |

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|------------------------------|---|
| 4. alteration | d. one's other self |
| 5. alter ego | e. a choice |
| 6. alternate (<i>adj.</i>) | f. morbidly, obsessively
wrapped up in oneself |

KEY: 1-f, 2-c, 3-e, 4-a, 5-d, 6-b

Do you understand the words?

If you have begun to understand these thirteen words, you will be able to respond to the following questions.

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|---|-----|----|
| 1. Is rejection usually a blow to one's <i>ego</i> ? | YES | NO |
| 2. Are <i>egocentric</i> people easy to get along with? | YES | NO |
| 3. Does an <i>egomaniac</i> have a normal personality? | YES | NO |
| 4. Are <i>egomaniacal</i> tendencies a sign of maturity? | YES | NO |
| 5. Is <i>altruism</i> a characteristic of selfish people? | YES | NO |
| 6. Are <i>altruistic</i> tendencies common to egoists? | YES | NO |
| 7. Is an <i>alternate</i> plan necessarily inferior? | YES | NO |
| 8. Does an <i>alternative</i> allow you some freedom of choice? | YES | NO |
| 9. Does <i>alteration</i> imply keeping things the same? | YES | NO |
| 10. Do excitable people often engage in <i>altercations</i> ? | YES | NO |
| 11. Is your <i>alter ego</i> usually quite similar to yourself? | YES | NO |

KEY: 1-yes, 2-no, 3-no, 4-no, 5-no, 6-no, 7-no, 8-yes, 9-no, 10-yes, 11-yes

Can you recall the words?

Have you learned these words so well that you can summon each one from your mind when a brief definition is offered? Review first if necessary; then, without further reference to previous pages, write the correct word in each blank. Make sure to check your spelling when you refer to the Key.

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|---|-----------|
| 1. one's other self | 1. A_____ |
| 2. to change | 2. A_____ |
| 3. a heated dispute | 3. A_____ |
| 4. excessively, morbidly obsessed
with one's own needs, desires, or
ambitions | 4. E_____ |
| 5. unselfish; more interested in the
welfare of others than in one's
own | 5. A_____ |
| 6. utterly involved with oneself;
self-centered | 6. E_____ |
| 7. a choice | 7. A_____ |
| 8. one who substitutes for another | 8. A_____ |

KEY: 1—alter ego, 2—alter, 3—altercation, 4—egomaniacal, 5—altruistic, 6—egocentric, 7—alternative, 8—alternate

(End of Session 2)