

The Path to Eloquence

**Merriam  
Webster's  
Vocabulary  
Builder**

The key to successful vocabulary improvement, from America's foremost dictionary publisher.

# **Merriam- Webster's Vocabulary Builder**

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**MERRIAM-WEBSTER, INCORPORATED**  
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# Introduction

*Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder* is designed to achieve two goals: to add a large number of words to your permanent working vocabulary, and to teach the most useful of the classical word-building roots to help you continue expanding your vocabulary in the future.

In order to achieve these goals, *Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder* employs an original approach that takes into account how people learn and remember. Many vocabulary builders simply present their words in alphabetical order, many provide little or no discussion of the words and how to use them, and a few even fail to show the kinds of sentences in which the words usually appear. But memorizing a series of random and unrelated things, especially for more than a few hours, can be difficult and time-consuming. The fact is that we tend to remember words easily and naturally when they appear in some meaningful text, when they have been shown to be useful and therefore worth remembering, and when they have been properly explained to us. Knowing precisely how to use a word is just as important as knowing what it means, and this book provides that needed additional information.

Greek and Latin have been the sources of most of the words in the English language. (The third principal source is the family of Germanic languages.) Almost all of these words were added to the language long after the fall of the Roman Empire, and they continue to be added to this day. New words are constantly being invented, and most of them, especially those in the sciences, are still making use of Greek and Latin roots. Many words contain more than one root, as you'll see in the following pages, and some mix Greek and Latin (and even Germanic) roots.

The roots in this book are only a fraction of those that exist, but they include the roots that have produced the largest number

of common English words. These roots (sometimes called *stems*) all formed part of Greek and Latin words. Some are shown in more than one form (for example, FLECT/FLEX), which means that they changed form in the original language, just as *buy* and *bought* are forms of the same English word. A knowledge of Greek and Latin roots will help you to remember the meanings of the words in this book, but it will also enable you to guess at the meanings of new words that you run into elsewhere. Remember what a root means and you will have at least a fighting chance of understanding a word in which it appears.

Each of the 200 roots in this book is followed by four words based on the root. Each group of eight words (two roots) is followed by two quizzes. Every fifth group is a special eight-word section which may contain words based on classical mythology or history, words borrowed directly from Greek or Latin, or other special categories of terms. Each set of 40 words makes up a unit. Thus, the 25 units in the book discuss in detail a total of 1,000 words. In addition, the brief paragraphs discussing each word include in *italics* many words closely related to the main words, in order to at least suggest how those related words may be used as well. Mastering a single word—for example, *phenomenon*—can thus increase your vocabulary by several words—for example, *phenomenal*, *phenomenally*, and the plural form *phenomena*.

The words presented here are not all on the same level of difficulty—some are quite simple and some are truly challenging—but the great majority are words that could be encountered on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and similar standardized tests. Most of them are in the vocabularies of well-educated Americans, including professionals such as scientists, lawyers, professors, doctors, and editors. Even those words you feel familiar with may only have a place in your *recognition* vocabulary—that is, the words that you recognize when you see or hear them but that you are not sure enough about to use in your own speech and writing.

Each main word is followed by its most common pronunciation. A few of the pronunciation symbols may be unfamiliar to you, but they can be learned very easily by referring to the pronunciation key on page xi.

The definition comes next. We have tried to provide only the most common senses or meanings of the word, in simple and straightforward language, and no more than two definitions of any word are given. A more complete range of definitions can be found

in a college dictionary such as *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*.

An example sentence marked with a bullet (●) follows the definition. This sentence by itself can indicate a great deal about the word, including the kind of sentence in which it often appears. It can also serve as a memory aid, since when you meet the word in the future you may recall the example sentence more easily than the definition.

An explanatory paragraph rounds out your introduction to each word. The paragraph may do a number of things: It may tell you what else you need to know in order to use the word intelligently and correctly, since the example sentence can't do this all by itself. It may tell you more about the word's roots and its history. It may discuss additional meanings. It will often give you additional example sentences that demonstrate various ways to use the word and to expect to see it used. It may demonstrate the use of closely related words. The paragraph may even offer an informative or entertaining glimpse into a subject not strictly related to the word. The intention is to make you as comfortable as possible with each word in turn and to enable you to start using it immediately, without fear of embarrassment.

The quizzes immediately following each eight-word group, along with the review quizzes at the end of each unit, will test your memory. Many of these quizzes are similar to those used on standardized tests such as the SAT. Some of them ask you to identify *synonyms*, words with the same or very similar meaning, or *antonyms*, words with the opposite meaning. Perhaps more difficult are the *analogies*, which ask that you choose the word that will make the relationship between the last two words the same as the relationship between the first two. Thus, you may be asked to complete the analogy "calculate : count :: expend : \_\_\_\_" (which can be read as "Calculate is to count as expend is to \_\_\_\_") by choosing one of four words: *stretch*, *speculate*, *pay*, and *explode*. Since *calculate* and *count* are nearly synonyms, you will choose a near synonym for *expend*, so the correct answer is *pay*.

Studies have shown that the only way a new word will remain alive in your vocabulary is if it is regularly reinforced through use and through reading. Learn the word here and look and listen for it elsewhere—you'll probably find yourself running into it frequently, just as when you have bought a new car you soon realize how many other people own the same model.

Carry this book in your shoulder bag or leave it on your night table. Whenever you find yourself with a few minutes to spare, open it to the beginning of a brief root group. (There's no real need to read the units in any particular order, since each unit is entirely self-contained. However, studying the book straight through from the beginning will ensure that you make maximum use of it.) Pick a single word or a four-word group or an eight-word section; study it, test yourself, and then try making up new sentences for each word. Be sure to pronounce every new word aloud at least once, along with its definition.

Start using the words immediately. As soon as you feel confident with a word, start trying to work it into your writing wherever appropriate—your papers and reports, your diary and your poetry. An old saying goes, "Use it three times and it's yours." That may be, but don't stop at three. Make the words part of your *working* vocabulary, the words that you can not only recognize when you see or hear them but that you can comfortably call on whenever you need them. Astonish your friends, amaze your relatives, astound *yourself* (while trying not to be too much of a showoff), and have fun.

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# Pronunciation Symbols

- ə . . . . **abut, collect, suppose**  
 'ə, ə . **humdrum**  
 ɔr . . . . **operation, further**  
 a . . . . **map, patch**  
 ā . . . . **day, fate**  
 ä . . . . **bother, cot, father**  
 ȃ . . . . a sound between \a\ and  
 \ä\, as in an Eastern New  
 England pronunciation of  
**aunt, ask**  
 aũ . . . . **now, out**  
 b . . . . **baby, rib**  
 ch . . . . **chin, catch**  
 d . . . . **did, adder**  
 e . . . . **set, red**  
 ē . . . . **beat, easy**  
 f . . . . **fifty, cuff**  
 g . . . . **go, big**  
 h . . . . **hat, ahead**  
 hw . . . . **whale**  
 i . . . . **tip, banish**  
 ī . . . . **site, buy**  
 j . . . . **job, edge**  
 k . . . . **kin, cook**  
 l . . . . **lily, cool**  
 m . . . . **murmur, dim**  
 n . . . . **nine, own**  
 ̃ . . . . indicates that a preceding  
 vowel is pronounced  
 through both nose and  
 mouth, as in French **bon**  
 \bõ^\  
 ŋ . . . . **sing, singer, finger, ink**  
 ð . . . . **bone, hollow**  
 ó . . . . **saw**  
 ói . . . . **toy**  
 p . . . . **pepper, lip**  
 r . . . . **rarity**  
 s . . . . **source, less**  
 sh . . . . **shy, mission**  
 t . . . . **tie, attack**  
 th . . . . **thin, ether**  
 th . . . . **then, either**  
 ü . . . . **boot, few** \fyü\  
 ú . . . . **put, pure** \pyü\  
 v . . . . **vivid, give**  
 w . . . . **we, away**  
 y . . . . **yard, cue** \kyü\  
 z . . . . **zone, raise**  
 zh . . . . **vision, pleasure**  
 \ . . . . slant line used in pairs to  
 mark the beginning and  
 end of a transcription:  
 \pen\  
 ' . . . . mark at the beginning of a  
 syllable that has primary  
 (strongest) stress: \shəf-  
 əl-,bōrd\  
 , . . . . mark at the beginning of a  
 syllable that has second-  
 ary (next-strongest) stress:  
 \shəf-əl-,bōrd\  
 - . . . . mark of a syllable division  
 in pronunciations

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# Unit 1

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**BELL** comes from the Latin word meaning “war.” *Bellona* was the little-known Roman goddess of war; her husband, Mars, was the god of war.

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**antebellum** \an-ti-'be-ləm\ Existing before a war, especially before the American Civil War (1861–65).

● When World War I was over, the French nobility found it impossible to return to their extravagant antebellum way of life.

Often the word *antebellum* summons up images of ease, elegance, and entertainment on a grand scale that disappeared in the postwar years. That way of life in the American South depended on a social structure that collapsed after the war. The years after the Civil War—and many other wars—were colored for some people by nostalgia and bitterness (Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* shows this through the eyes of the Southern gentry), and for others by relief and anticipation.

**bellicose** \'be-li-,kōs\ Warlike, aggressive, quarrelsome.

● The country often elected the more bellicose party after a period of tension along the border, hoping that military action would result.

The international relations of a nation with a bellicose foreign policy tend to be stormy and difficult, since such a nation looks for opportunities to fight rather than to negotiate. Combative by nature, it is happiest when quarreling or, better yet, actively engaged in battle.

**belligerence** \bə-'li-jə-rəns\ Aggressiveness, combativeness.

- The belligerence in Turner's voice told them that the warning was a serious threat.

The belligerence of Marlon Brando's performance as the violent Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* electrified the country. *Belligerent* speeches by leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States throughout the Cold War kept the world on edge for years. Iraq's shocking belligerence toward Kuwait and its own Kurdish people resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths.

**rebellion** \ri-'bel-yən\ Open defiance and opposition, sometimes armed, to a person or thing in authority.

- The substitute teacher attempted to end the student rebellion by insisting on absolute quiet.

These days, some degree of rebellion against parents and other authority figures is viewed as a normal part of growing up, as long as it is not destructive and does not go on too long. Rebellion, armed or otherwise, has often served to alert those in power to the discontent of those they control. The American War of Independence was first viewed by the British as a minor rebellion that would soon run its course.

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**PAC/PEAS** comes from the Roman word for "peace." The *Pacific Ocean*—that is, the "Peaceful Ocean"—was named by Magellan because it seemed so calm after the storms of Cape Horn. (He obviously never witnessed a Pacific hurricane.)

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**pacify** \ˈpa-sə-,fɪ\ (1) To soothe anger or agitation. (2) To subdue by armed action.

- It took the police hours to pacify the angry demonstrators.

Unhappy babies are often given a rubber device for sucking called a *pacifier* to make them stop crying. In the same way, someone stirred up by anger or some other strong emotion can usually be pacified by resolving or removing its causes. In a usage that became popular during the Vietnam War, *pacification* of an area meant using armed force to neutralize the enemy, there and to quiet the local people who may have been supporting them.

**pacifist** \ˈpa-sə-fɪst\ A person opposed to war or violence, especially someone who refuses to bear arms or to fight, on moral or religious grounds.

- Always a strong pacifist, in later life he took to promoting actively the cause of peace and nonviolence.

Pacifists have not always met with sympathy or understanding. Refusing to fight ever for any reason, or even just in a particular situation when the reasons for fighting seem clear to many others, calls for strong faith in one's own moral or religious convictions, since it has often resulted in persecution by those who disagree. The Quakers and the Jehovah's Witnesses are *pacifist* religious groups; Henry D. Thoreau and Martin Luther King are probably the most famous American pacifists.

**pact** \ˈpakt\ An agreement between two or more people or groups; a treaty or formal agreement between nations to deal with a problem or to resolve a dispute.

- The girls made a pact never to reveal what had happened on that terrifying night in the abandoned house.

Since a pact often ends a period of unfriendly relations, the word has "peace" at its root. *Pact* is generally used in the field of international relations, where we often speak of an "arms pact" or a "fishing-rights pact." But it may also be used for a solemn agreement or promise between two people.

**appease** ə-ˈpiːz\ To make peaceful and quiet; to calm, satisfy.

- The Aztecs offered mass human sacrifices—of 80,000 prisoners on one occasion!—in order to appease their gods.

When the European nations agreed to let Adolf Hitler take over part of Czechoslovakia in 1938, in a vain attempt to prevent a larger war, their opponents shouted that they were practicing a foolish *appeasement* that was doomed to fail. (They were right—within months Hitler had violated the *pact*.) A child's anger may be appeased with a little effort; an angry god or goddess may demand something extreme. We may speak of hunger being appeased by food. Appeasing usually involves giving something, whereas *pacifying* can refer to anything from stroking a baby to using armed force to stop an uprising.

## Quizzes

### A. Match the word on the left to the correct definition on the right:

- |                 |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 1. antebellum   | a. quarrelsome             |
| 2. appease      | b. solemn agreement        |
| 3. rebellion    | c. to make peaceful        |
| 4. pacify       | d. before the war          |
| 5. pacifist     | e. aggressiveness          |
| 6. belligerence | f. opposition to authority |
| 7. pact         | g. to calm by satisfying   |
| 8. bellicose    | h. one who opposes war     |

### B. Fill in each blank with the correct letter:

- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| a. antebellum | e. rebellion    |
| b. pacifist   | f. bellicose    |
| c. pact       | g. pacify       |
| d. appease    | h. belligerence |
1. The native \_\_\_\_\_ began at midnight, when a gang of youths massacred the Newton family and set the house afire.
  2. The grand \_\_\_\_\_ mansion has hardly been altered since it was built in 1841.
  3. The Senate Republicans, outraged by their treatment, were in a \_\_\_\_\_ mood.
  4. To \_\_\_\_\_ the younger managers, the company will double their bonuses this year.
  5. The cease-fire \_\_\_\_\_ that had been reached with such effort was shattered by the news of the slaughter.
  6. Their relations during the divorce proceedings had been mostly friendly, so his \_\_\_\_\_ in the judge's chambers surprised her.
  7. The world watched in amazement as the gentle \_\_\_\_\_ Gandhi won India its independence with almost no bloodshed.
  8. Her soft lullabies could always \_\_\_\_\_ the unhappy infant.

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**HOSP/HOST** comes from the Latin word meaning “host” or “guest.” *Hospitality* is what a good *host* or *hostess* offers to a guest. A *hospital* was once a house for religious pilgrims and other travelers, or a home for the aged.

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**hostage** \ˈhäs-tij\ A person given or held to ensure that an agreement, demand, or treaty is kept or fulfilled.

● The kidnappers released their hostage unharmed once all their demands were met.

It used to be a common practice between opponents in war to exchange hostages so as to ensure that a truce or treaty would remain unbroken. Today, hostages are more likely to be taken against their will, and used by kidnappers or terrorists or rebels to bargain for money or concessions. It may seem strange that the word *hostage* is connected with *host* and in fact with *guest* as well, since hostages are now unwilling guests, at the mercy of their *hostile* hosts.

**hospice** \ˈhäs-pəs\ A place or program to help care for the terminally ill.

● Uncle Harold was moved to the hospice only after my aunt had almost collapsed with exhaustion while caring for him.

In the Middle Ages, hospices run by monks and nuns gave shelter and food to travelers and the poor. Now, hospices are institutions that take care of people who are too ill to be at home but whose lives cannot be saved by hospital care—often those with incurable cancer or AIDS, for example. More and more Americans are relying on “home hospice care”—care by visiting nurses and volunteers for terminally ill patients who have decided to live their last months at home.

**hostel** \ˈhäs-təl\ An inexpensive, supervised place for young travelers to stay overnight.

● Generations of American college students have traveled through Europe cheaply by staying at hostels instead of hotels.

Throughout Europe and in some other parts of the world, a network of youth hostels provides cheap, safe (although not always quiet)

overnight shelter for younger bicyclists, hikers, and canoeists. The United States has over 200 youth hostels, many of them in New England. Worldwide, there are more than 5,000.

**inhospitable** \in-hä-'spi-tə-bəl (1) Not welcoming or generous; unfriendly. (2) Providing no shelter or food (such as a desert).

- Shot down by government agents, the smuggler struggled for survival on the rocky, inhospitable island.

An inhospitable host fails to make his guests comfortable, in order to show them they are unwelcome. An inhospitable territory, such as Death Valley or Antarctica, may be barren and harsh in its climate. In a similar way, a country may be called inhospitable to democracy, just as a company may be called inhospitable to new ideas.

**AM/IM** comes from the Latin word *amor*, “love.” *Amiable* means “friendly or good-natured,” and *amigo* is Spanish for “friend.”

**amicable** \a-mi-kə-bəl Friendly, peaceful.

- Their relations with their in-laws were generally amicable, despite some bickering during the holidays.

*Amicable* often describes relations between two groups or especially two nations—for example, the United States and Canada, which are proud of sharing the longest unguarded border in the world. When *amicable* describes personal relations, it tends to indicate a rather formal friendliness.

**enamored** \i-'na-mərd\ Charmed or fascinated; inflamed with love.

- Rebecca quickly became enamored of the town's rustic surroundings, its slow pace, and its eccentric characters.

Computer hackers are always enamored of their new programs and games. Millions of readers have found themselves enamored with Jane Austen's novels. And Romeo and Juliet were utterly enamored of each other. (Note that both *of* and *with* are commonly used after *enamored*.)

**inimical** \i-'ni-mi-kəl Hostile, unfriendly, or harmful.



● This latest report, like so many earlier ones, found that too great a concern with test scores was inimical to a broad education.

The *in-* with which *inimical* begins negates the meaning of the root. This word rarely describes a person; instead, it is generally used to describe forces, concepts, or situations. For example, high inflation may be called inimical to economic growth; tolerance of racist comments in an office may be seen as inimical to minorities; and rapid population growth may be inimical to a country's standard of living.

**paramour** \ˈpɑr-ə-,mɪr\ A lover, often secret, not allowed by law or custom.

● He was her paramour for many years before she finally divorced her husband.

*Paramour* includes the prefix *par -*, "by or through." This implies a relationship based solely on love, often physical love, rather than on a social custom or ceremony. Today it usually refers to the lover of a married man or woman.

## Quizzes

### A. Choose the odd word:

1. hostel    a. shelter    b. hotel    c. prison    d. dormitory
2. inimical    a. unfriendly    b. sympathetic    c. antagonistic  
d. harmful
3. hospice    a. nursing    b. travel    c. hospital    d. illness
4. amicable    a. difficult    b. friendly    c. pleasant  
d. peaceful
5. enamored    a. strengthened    b. charmed    c. fond  
d. fascinated
6. inhospitable    a. inimical    b. barren    c. unfriendly  
d. inviting
7. paramour    a. lover    b. husband    c. mistress  
d. significant other
8. hostage    a. exchange    b. guarantee    c. pledge    d. hotel

### B. Complete the analogy:

1. charming : enchanting :: inimical : \_\_\_\_\_  
a. sublime    b. harmful    c. direct    d. cautious