

**The  
Merriam-Webster  
Dictionary  
of  
Quotations**

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*A Merriam-Webster®*



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## PREFACE

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THE MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY OF QUOTATIONS is a collection of 4,000 quotations on a wide variety of topics that have traditionally engaged the human imagination, topics such as Anger, Beauty, Birth, Death, Life, Love, Money, Power, and Truth. In addition, the collection also includes quotations regarding some relatively modern concerns: America and Americans, Automobiles, Computers, Photography, Technology, and Television. Within all of these categories, we have sought to provide a mixture of the traditional and the modern, the well known and the not so well known, the literary and the popular.

We are indebted to those who have gone before us in establishing the pattern and principles on which quotation books are founded. While we have endeavored to offer the reader a fresh selection of quotations, we could not omit many of the most familiar words of the world's greatest thinkers and writers. Thus, it is inevitable that many of the quotations here will also be found in other quotation books. A close observer may find differences in the way that a single passage is presented in different quotation books. Sometimes an error is involved, and we have been able to correct some of these from our research in the original sources. More often the difference is simply a matter of how words originally written in another language are translated into English, or of the fact that a work written in English may differ in wording from edition to edition.

In general, we have attempted to stay with the original styling used by an author. However, we have

Americanized spelling in most cases, the poems of Robert Burns being a notable exception. We have also used English titles of foreign-language works where a standard translated version exists. Quotations from the Bible have been taken from the Authorized (King James) Version.

Quotations in this book are gathered together under approximately 400 subject categories, and the categories themselves are in alphabetical order. Within each category, quotations are given alphabetically by author. In addition, cross-references are given for words that are closely related to names of categories and for words that are a part of category names:

**Behavior**—see ACTION; MANNERS

**Compliments**—see PRAISE AND FLATTERY

**Computers**—see also TECHNOLOGY

**Defeat**—see VICTORY AND DEFEAT

For each quotation, we have attempted to identify both the author and the original source in which the quotation can be found. For quotations that first appeared in speeches or letters, we have designated the source simply as "speech" or "letter." For quotations whose author is known but whose original source cannot be determined, we have used the designation "attributed."

Following some quotations there are bracketed editorial notes that provide additional information about the wording, context, authorship, or source of the quotation or even about similar passages by other writers.

The chief business of the American people is business. —CALVIN COOLIDGE, speech (1925)

[Often quoted as: "The business of America is business."]

For years I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and vice versa.

—CHARLES E. WILSON, said in testimony before a U.S. Senate hearing

[Wilson, former president of General Motors, said this in his confirmation hearings for Secretary of Defense. It is often misquoted as: "What's good for General Motors is good for the country."]

A precedent embalms a principle. —BENJAMIN DISRAELI, speech (1848)

[This has also been attributed to William Scott (Lord Stowell).]

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required. —BIBLE, *Luke* 12:48

[John F. Kennedy paraphrased this in a speech in 1961: "For of those to whom much is given, much is required."]

Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise —BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, *Poor Richard's Almanac*

[James Thurber's variant in *Fables for Our Time*: "Early to rise and early to bed makes a man healthy and wealthy and dead."]

Following the quotations section of the book, there is an Index of Authors Quoted. This is an alphabetical list of the authors quoted with references to the subject categories under which they are

## PREFACE

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quoted. When an author is quoted in an editorial note following a quotation, the reader is directed to the category and author's name under which the quotation is listed. At an index entry for an author who is one of two or more joint authors, the reader is directed to the category and the name of the first-listed author. The index also contains entries for alternative names of people known by more than one name, especially in the case of authors using pen names. In the index, *Mc-* names are alphabetized as if spelled *Mac-*.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Quotations, like other Merriam-Webster® publications, represents a collective effort. The quotations were selected, annotated, and assigned to categories by Sharon Goldstein, working in consultation with the Merriam-Webster Editorial Department. Fact-checking and proofreading were done by Eileen M. Haraty and Mary W. Cornog. Data entry was done by Karen J. Levister. Frederick C. Mish, Editorial Director, and John M. Morse, Executive Editor, helped to prepare the plan for the book. Copyediting and overall project design and coordination was provided by Robert D. Copeland, Senior Editor.

**Ability**

Natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning by study. —FRANCIS BACON, *Essays*

In the last analysis, ability is commonly found to consist mainly in a high degree of solemnity. —AMBROSE BIERCE, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Natural ability without education has more often attained to glory and virtue than education without natural ability. —CICERO, *Pro Archia Poeta*

The superior man is distressed by his want of ability. —CONFUCIUS, *Analects*

The winds and waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators. —EDWARD GIBBON, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

It is a great ability to be able to conceal one's ability. —LA ROCHEFOUCAULD, *Maxims*

Competence, like truth, beauty and contact lenses, is in the eye of the beholder. —LAURENCE J. PETER, *The Peter Principle*

Every man loves what he is good at. —THOMAS SHADWELL, *A True Widow*

Intelligence is quickness to apprehend as distinct from ability, which is capacity to act wisely on the thing apprehended. —ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD, *Dialogues*

**Absence**

Absence makes the heart grow fonder,  
Isle of Beauty, fare thee well!

—THOMAS HAYNES BAYLY, *Isle of Beauty*



## ABSTINENCE

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[Bayly's wording is the wording now current, but the thought is ancient. Sextus Propertius wrote in his *Elegies*: "Among absent lovers, ardor always fairs better."]

The heart may think it knows better: the senses know that absence blots people out. We have really no absent friends. —ELIZABETH BOWEN, *The Death of the Heart*

Absence is to love what wind is to a fire; it puts out the little, it kindles the great. —ROGER DE BUSSY-RABUTIN, *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*

[This analogy of love to a fire was also made by La Rochefoucauld, in his *Maxims*: "Absence diminishes mediocre passions and increases great ones, as the wind blows out candles and fans fire."]

Absence, that common cure of love. —MIGUEL DE CERVANTES, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*

The absent are always in the wrong. —DESTOUCHES, *L'Obstacle imprévu*

Love reckons hours for months, and days for years;

And every little absence is an age.

—JOHN DRYDEN, *Amphitryon*

Sometimes, only one person is missing, and the whole world seems depopulated. —ALPHONSE DE LAMARTINE, *Premières méditations poétiques*

**Abstinence** — See MODERATION AND ABSTINENCE

### **Absurdity**

The absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to. —ALBERT CAMUS, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Those who are serious in ridiculous matters will be ridiculous in serious matters. —CATO THE ELDER, quoted in Plutarch's *Moralia: Sayings of Kings and Commanders*

Life is a jest, and all things show it;  
I thought so once, but now I know it.

—JOHN GAY, "My Own Epitaph"

[This is inscribed on Gay's monument in Westminster Abbey.]

What is utterly absurd happens in the world.  
—NIKOLAI GOGOL, "The Nose"

. . . the privilege of absurdity, to which no living creature is subject but men only. —THOMAS HOBBES, *Leviathan*

From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step.  
—NAPOLEON I, attributed

Life is full of infinite absurdities, which, strangely enough, do not even need to appear plausible, since they are true. —LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

People who cannot recognize a palpable absurdity are very much in the way of civilization. —AGNES REPLIER, *In Pursuit of Laughter*

**Abuse** — See INSULTS AND ABUSE

**Achievement** — See also SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The tree is known by his fruit. —BIBLE, *Matthew* 12:33

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. —BIBLE, *II Timothy* 4:7

## ACHIEVEMENT

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**Measure not the work  
Until the day's out and the labor done.**

—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING, *Aurora Leigh*

One never notices **what** has been done; one can only see what remains to be done. —MARIE CURIE, letter (1894)

The reward of a **thing well done** is to have done it.  
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, *Essays*

We judge ourselves by **what we feel capable of doing**, while others judge **us by what we have already done**.  
—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, *Kavanagh*

Each morning sees some task begin,  
Each evening **sees** it close;  
Something attempted, something done,  
Has earned a night's repose.

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, "The Village Blacksmith"

To do all that one is able to do, is to be a man; to do all that one would like to do, is to be a god. —NAPOLEON I, attributed

Let's talk sense to the American people. Let's tell them the truth, that there are no gains without pains.  
—ADLAI E. STEVENSON, speech (accepting nomination for President, 1952)

[The expression "No pains, no gains" appeared as early as 1670, in John Ray's *English Proverbs*.]

Is there anything in life so disenchanting as attainment? —ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, *The New Arabian Nights*

To achieve great things we must live as though we were never going to die. —MARQUIS DE VAUVERNARGUES, *Reflections and Maxims*

**Acting** — See THEATER AND FILM, ACTORS AND ACTING

**Action**

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

—BIBLE, *Ecclesiastes* 9:10

[Cicero offered the same advice, in *De Senectute*:  
"Whatever you do, do with all your might."]

He who desires but acts not breeds pestilence.

—WILLIAM BLAKE, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

The world can only be grasped by action, not by contemplation. The hand is more important than the eye. . . . The hand is the cutting edge of the mind.

—JACOB BRONOWSKI, *The Ascent of Man*

Think'st thou existence doth depend on time?  
It doth; but actions are our epochs.

—LORD BYRON, *Manfred*

In order to act you must be somewhat insane. A reasonably sensible man is satisfied with thinking.

—GEORGES CLEMENCEAU, quoted in *Clemenceau, The Events of His Life As Told by Himself to His Former Secretary, Jean Martet*

Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. —JOSEPH CONRAD, *Nostromo*

Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds. —GEORGE ELIOT, *Adam Bede*

We never do anything well till we cease to think about the manner of doing it. —WILLIAM HAZLITT, *Sketches and Essays*

The great end of life is not knowledge but action.  
—THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY, *Technical Education*

I have always thought the actions of men the best interpreters of their thoughts. —JOHN LOCKE, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

Every man feels instinctively that all the beautiful sentiments in the world weigh less than a single lovely action. —JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, *Among My Books*

Action is eloquence. —SHAKESPEARE, *Coriolanus*

If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. —SHAKESPEARE, *The Merchant of Venice*

Action is transitory—a step, a blow,  
The motion of a muscle, this way or that—  
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy  
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed.  
—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, *The Borderers*

**Adolescence** — See also YOUTH

The "teenager" seems to have replaced the Communist as the appropriate target for public controversy and foreboding. —EDGAR Z. FRIEDENBERG, *The Vanishing Adolescent*

The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness. —JOHN KEATS, *Endymion*

Oh the innocent girl  
in her maiden teens  
knows perfectly well  
what everything means.

—D.H. LAWRENCE, "The Jeune Fille"

So much of adolescence is an ill-defined dying,  
An intolerable waiting,  
A longing for another place and time,  
Another condition.

—THEODORE ROETHKE, "I'm Here"

At sixteen, the adolescent knows about suffering because he himself has suffered, but he barely knows that other beings also suffer. —JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, *Emile*

Just at the age 'twixt boy and youth,  
When thought is speech, and speech is truth.

—SIR WALTER SCOTT, *Marmion*

I would there were no age between sixteen and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting. —SHAKESPEARE, *The Winter's Tale*

Until the rise of American advertising, it never occurred to anyone anywhere in the world that the teenager was a captive in a hostile world of adults.

—GORE VIDAL, *Rocking the Boat*

**Adultery** — See INFIDELITY

**Adventure** — See also BOLDNESS AND ENTERPRISE

Adventure is the vitaminizing element in histories both individual and social. —WILLIAM BOLITHO, *Twelve Against the Gods*

## ADVERSITY

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An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered. —G.K. CHESTERTON, *All Things Considered*

The fruit of my tree of knowledge is plucked, and it is this: "Adventures are to the adventurous." —BENJAMIN DISRAELI, *Ixton in Heaven*

The true adventurer goes forth aimless and uncalculating to meet and greet unknown fate. —O. HENRY, "The Green Door"

**Adversity** — See also PROBLEMS

Prosperity doth best discover vice, but Adversity doth best discover virtue. —FRANCIS BACON, *Essays*

Most of our misfortunes are more supportable than the comments of our friends upon them. —CHARLES CALEB COLTON, *Lacon*

It is difficulties that show what men are. —EPICTE-TUS, *Discourses*

The greatest object in the universe, says a certain philosopher, is a good man struggling with adversity; yet there is still a greater, which is the good man that comes to relieve it. —OLIVER GOLDSMITH, *The Vicar of Wakefield*

[The philosopher was probably Seneca, who wrote in *De Providentia*: "Behold a contest worthy of a god, a brave man matched in conflict with adversity."]

To great evils we submit; we resent little provocations. —WILLIAM HAZLITT, *Literary Remains*

If a man talks of his misfortunes there is something in them that is not disagreeable to him; for where there is nothing but pure misery there never is any recourse to the mention of it. —SAMUEL JOHNSON, quoted in James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson*

Mishaps are like knives, that either serve us or cut us,  
as we grasp them by the blade or the handle.

—JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, *Fireside Travels*

Who would have known of Hector, if Troy had been  
happy? The road to valor is built by adversity.

—OVID, *Tristia*

I never knew any man in my life who could not bear  
another's misfortunes perfectly like a Christian.

—ALEXANDER POPE, *Thoughts on Various Subjects*

[The same thought had occurred to La Rochefoucauld, expressed in his *Maxims*: "We all have strength enough to bear the misfortunes of others."]

Nothing is so bitter that a calm mind cannot find comfort in it. —SENECA, *De Tranquillitate Animi*

Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.

—SHAKESPEARE, *As You Like It*

### **Advertising**

Good times, bad times, there will always be advertising. In good times people want to advertise; in bad times they have to. —BRUCE BARTON, *In Town and Country*

You can tell the ideals of a nation by its advertisements. —NORMAN DOUGLAS, *South Wind*

We grew up founding our dreams on the infinite promise of American advertising. —ZELDA FITZGERALD, *Save Me the Waltz*

Advertising may be described as the science of arresting human intelligence long enough to get money from it. —STEPHEN LEACOCK, *Garden of Folly*



## ADVICE

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The consumer isn't a moron; she is your wife. You insult her intelligence if you assume that a mere slogan and a few vapid adjectives will persuade her to buy anything. —DAVID OGILVY, *Confessions of an Advertising Man*

### Advice

Never play cards with a man called Doc. Never eat at a place called Mom's. Never sleep with a woman whose troubles are worse than your own. —NELSON ALGREN, quoted in *Newsweek*

Who cannot give good counsel? 'Tis cheap, it costs them nothing. —ROBERT BURTON, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

Good but rarely came from good advice. —LORD BYRON, *Don Juan*

Advice is seldom welcome; and those who want it the most always like it the least. —LORD CHESTERFIELD, *Letters to His Son*

We ask advice, but we mean approbation. —CHARLES CALEB COLTON, *Lacon*

The advice of the elders to young men is very apt to be as unreal as a list of the hundred best books. —OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, JR., speech (1897)

Whatever advice you give, be brief. —HORACE, *Ars Poetica*

Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn't. —ERICA JONG, *How to Save Your Own Life*

I give myself sometimes admirable advice, but I am incapable of taking it. —LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU, letter (1725)