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# The Merriam- Webster Vocabulary Builder

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**Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder**  
Second Edition

Mary Wood Cornog



Merriam-Webster, Incorporated  
Springfield, Massachusetts



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# INTRODUCTION

## to the Second Edition

*Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder* is designed to achieve two goals: (1) to add a large number of words to your permanent working vocabulary, and (2) to teach the most useful of the classical word-building roots to help you continue expanding your vocabulary in the future.

To achieve these goals, *Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder* employs an original approach that takes into account how people learn and remember. Some vocabulary builders simply present their words in alphabetical order; some 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 can be difficult and time-consuming. The fact is that we tend to remember words easily and naturally when they appear in some meaningful context, when they've been shown to be useful and therefore worth remembering, and when they've been properly explained to us. Knowing precisely how to use a word is just as important as knowing what it means.

Greek and Latin have been the sources of most of the words in the English language (the third principal source being the family of Germanic languages). All these words were added to the language long after the fall of the Roman empire, and more continue to be added to this day, with most new words—especially those in the sciences—still making use of Greek and Latin roots. A knowledge of Greek and Latin roots will not only help you remember the meanings of the words in this book but will help you guess at the meanings of new words that you run into elsewhere. Remember what a root means and you'll have at least a fighting chance of understanding a word in which it appears.

The roots in this book are only a fraction of those that exist, but they include almost all the roots that have produced the largest number of common English words. All these roots (sometimes called *stems*) formed parts of Greek and Latin words. Some are shown in more than one form (for example, CRAC/CRAT), which means that they changed form in the original language, just as *buy* and *bought* are forms of the same English word.

Each of the more than 250 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 of words 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 30 units in the book discuss in detail a total of 1,200 words. In addition, the brief paragraphs discussing each word include in italics many words closely related to the main words. So mastering a single word (for example, *compel*) can increase your vocabulary by several words (in this case, *compelling*, *compulsion*, and *compulsive*).

The words presented here aren't 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 SAT and similar standardized tests. Most of them are in the vocabularies of well-educated Americans, including professionals such as scientists, lawyers, professors, and doctors. Even the words you feel familiar with may only have a place in your *recognition* vocabulary—that is, the words you recognize when you see or hear them but don't actually use in your own speech and writing.

Each main word is followed by its most common pronunciation. Any pronunciation symbols unfamiliar to you can be learned easily by referring to the Pronunciation Symbols table on page vii.

The definition comes next. We've tried to provide only the most common senses or meanings of each 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*.)

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; when you meet the word in the future, you may recall the example sentence more easily than the definition.

An explanatory paragraph rounds out each entry. 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, when the definition and example sentence aren't enough. It may tell you more about the word's roots and its history. It may discuss additional meanings or provide additional example sentences. It may demonstrate the use of closely related words. And it may provide an informative or entertaining glimpse into a subject 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 following each eight-word group, along with the review quizzes at the end of each unit, will test your memory. Many of them ask you to fill in a blank in a sentence. Others require you to identify *synonyms* (words with the same or very similar meaning) or *antonyms* (words with the opposite meaning). Perhaps most 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's 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've 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 show-off)—and have fun!

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## Pronunciation Symbols

ə	banana, collide, abut
'e,,e	humdrum, abut
ə	immediately preceding /l/, /n/, /m/, /ŋ/, as in batt <b>le</b> , mitt <b>en</b> , eat <b>en</b> , and sometimes open /'ō_p ə m/, lock <b>and</b> key /_ ə ŋ/
ər	further, merger, bird
ə	mat, map, mad, gag, snap, patch
ā	day, fade, date, aorta, drape, cape
ä	bother, cot
är	car, heart, bazaar, bizarre
au	now, loud, out
b	baby, rib
ch	chin, nature /'nāchər/
d	did, adder
e	bet, bed, peck
er	bare, fair, wear, millionaire
ē	easy, mealy
f	fifty, cuff
g	go, big, gift
h	hat, ahead
i	tip, banish, active
ir	near, deer, mere, pier
i	site, side, buy, tripe
j	job, gem, edge, join, judge
k	kin, cook, ache
l	lily, pool
m	murmur, dim, nymph
n	no, own
ŋ	sing /'siŋ/, singer /'siŋ_ər/, finger /'fiŋ_ɡər/, ink /'iŋk/
ō	bone, know, beau
ō	saw, all, gnaw, caught
oi	coin, destroy
ór	boar, port, door, shore
p	pepper, lip
r	red, rarity
s	source, less



sh	as in <b>shy</b> , <b>mission</b> , <b>machine</b> , <b>special</b>
t	<b>tie</b> , <b>attack</b> , <b>late</b> , <b>later</b> , <b>latter</b>
th	as in <b>thin</b> , <b>ether</b>
th	<b>then</b> , <b>either</b> , <b>this</b>
ü	<b>r</b> ule, <b>y</b> outh, union /'Yün.Yən/, few /'fyü/
ü	<b>p</b> ull, <b>w</b> ood, <b>b</b> ook
ür	<b>b</b> oor, <b>t</b> our, <b>i</b> n <b>s</b> ure
v	<b>v</b> ivid, <b>g</b> ive
w	<b>w</b> e, <b>a</b> way
y	<b>y</b> ard, <b>y</b> oung, <b>c</b> ue /'kyü/, <b>m</b> ute /'myüt/, union /'Yün.Yən/
z	<b>z</b> one, <b>r</b> aise
zh	as in <b>v</b> ision, <b>a</b> zure /'a.zhər/
/	slash used in pairs to mark the beginning and end of a transcription: /'Pen/
'	mark preceding a syllable with primary (strongest) stress: /'Pen.mən.ship/
,	mark preceding a syllable with secondary (medium) stress: /'Pen.mən.ship/
-	mark of syllable division

# Unit 1

[BENE AM BELL PAC CRIM PROB GRAV LEV Words from Mythology and History](#)  
[Quiz 1-1](#) [Quiz 1-2](#) [Quiz 1-3](#) [Quiz 1-4](#) [Quiz 1-5](#) [Review Quizzes 1](#)

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**BENE** is Latin for “well.” A *benefit* is a good result or effect. Something *beneficial* produces good results or effects. The Latin root can be heard in other languages as well: “Good!” or “Fine!” in Spanish is “Bueno!”; in French, it’s “Bon!”; and in Italian, just say “Bene!”

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**benediction** /ˌbe.nə.'dɪk.ʃən/ A prayer that asks for God's blessing, especially a prayer that concludes a worship service.

- The moment the bishop had finished his benediction, she squeezed quickly out of her row and darted out the cathedral's side entrance.

In *benediction*, the *bene* root is joined by another Latin root, *dictio*, “speaking” (see [DICT](#)), so the word's meaning becomes something like “well-wishing.” Perhaps the best-known benediction is the so-called Aaronic Benediction from the Bible, which begins, “May the Lord bless you and keep you.” An important section of the Catholic Mass was traditionally known as the *Benedictus*, after its first word (meaning “blessed”). It was St. *Benedict* who organized the first Christian monasteries; many Christians have been baptized Benedict in his honor, and 16 popes have taken it as their papal name.

**benefactor** /'be.nə.fak.tər/ Someone who helps another person or group, especially by giving money.

- An anonymous benefactor had given \$15 million to establish an ecological institute at the university.

A benefactor may be involved in almost any field. One may endow a scholarship fund; another may give money to expand a library; still another may leave a generous sum to a hospital in her will. The famous *benefactions* of John D. Rockefeller included the gifts that established the University of Chicago, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Rockefeller University. Many benefactors have reported that giving away their money turned out to be the most rewarding thing they ever did.

**beneficiary** /,be.nə.'fi:ʃē.er.ē/ A person or organization that benefits or is expected to benefit from something, especially one that receives money or property when someone dies.

- Living in a trailer in near-poverty, she received word in the mail that her father had died, naming her as the sole beneficiary of his life-insurance policy.

*Beneficiary* is often used in connection with life insurance, but it shows up in many other contexts as well. A college may be the beneficiary of a private donation. Your uncle's will may make a church his sole beneficiary, in which case all his money and property will go to it when he dies. A “third-party beneficiary” of a contract is a person (often a child) who the people signing the contract (which is usually an insurance policy or an employee-benefit plan) want to benefit from it. In a more general way, a small business may be a beneficiary of changes to the tax code, or a restaurant may be the beneficiary when the one across the street closes down and its whole lunch crowd starts coming in.

**benevolence** /bəˈnev.əl.əns/ Kindness, generosity.

- In those financially desperate years, the young couple was saved only by the benevolence of her elderly great-uncle.

Part of *benevolence* comes from the Latin root meaning “wish.” The novels of Charles Dickens often include a *benevolent* figure who rescues the main characters at some point—Mr. Brownlow in *Oliver Twist*, Abel Magwitch in *David Copperfield*, Mr. Jarndyce in *Bleak House*, Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. To be benevolent, it helps to have money, but it's not necessary; kind assistance of a nonfinancial sort may turn out to be lifesaving benevolence as well.

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**AM** comes from the Latin *amare*, “to love.” The Roman god of love was known by two different names, Cupid and *Amor*. *Amiable* means “friendly or good-natured,” and *amigo* is Spanish for “friend.”

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**amicable** /'a.mi.ke.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. So we often speak of an amicable meeting or an amicable settlement. When *amicable* describes more personal relations, it may indicate a rather formal friendliness. But it's always nice when two friends who've been quarreling manage to have an amicable conversation and to say amicable good-byes at the end.



**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, of course, utterly enamored of each other. But we also often use the word in negative contexts: A friend at work may complain that she's not enamored of the new boss, and when you start talking about how you're not enamored with the neighbors it may be time to move. (Note that both *of* and *with* are commonly used after *enamored*.)

**amorous** /'a.me.rəs/ Having or showing strong feelings of attraction or love.

- It turned out that the amorous Congressman had gotten his girlfriend a good job and was paying for her apartment.

A couple smooching on a park bench could be called amorous, or a young married couple who are always hugging and kissing. But the word is often used a bit sarcastically, as when a tabloid newspaper gets hold of some scandalous photos and calls the participants “the amorous pair.” In such cases, we may be encouraged to think the attraction is more physical than emotional.

**paramour** /ˈpær.ə.mɪr/ A lover, often secret, not allowed by law or custom.

- He had been coming to the house for two years before her brothers realized that he was actually the paramour of their shy and withdrawn sister.

*Paramour* came to English from French (a language based on Latin), though the modern French don't use the word. Since *par amour* meant “through love,” it implies a relationship based solely on love, often physical love, rather than on social custom or ceremony. So today it tends to refer to the lover of a married man or woman, but may be used for any lover who isn't obeying the social rules.

## Quiz 1-1

### A. Choose the closest synonym:

1. beneficiary  
a. benefit b. prayer c. recipient d. contributor
2. amorous  
a. friendly b. sympathetic c. loving d. kind
3. benediction  
a. blessing b. gift c. saint d. favor
4. amicable  
a. difficult b. friendly c. curious d. lazy
5. enamored  
a. strengthened b. engaged c. fond d. free
6. benefactor  
a. supporter b. priest c. donation d. kindness
7. paramour  
a. lover b. husband c. heaven d. affection
8. benevolence  
a. value b. kindness c. luck d. approval

[Answers](#)