

Building Vocabulary: Common Root Words

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Summary: Lists and defines common Greek and Latin root words.

Learning Objectives: To list common root words and their definitions. To expand vocabulary. To increase reading comprehension.

Root words provide the basic structure and meaning to words. English root words and their meanings are commonly derived from Greek and Latin roots. For example, the root *soph* is derived from the Greek root *sophos* meaning *wise*. Learning and recognizing these common roots can help you decipher meaning. For example, if you were unfamiliar with the word *sophisticated* but knew the root word *soph*, you could gather some sort of meaning for the word from the root meaning, *wise*.

In many cases, knowing the root word will be enough to help you decipher the meaning of a word in a sentence; in other cases, you'll want to use the dictionary to understand the word fully. In either instance, the root and its meaning will at least give a partial understanding of a more complete definition. For instance, *sophisticated* means "finely experienced and aware" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2007, p. 1190).

What follows is a list of common roots words that you can remember to help expand your vocabulary and increase your reading comprehension. To help build your vocabulary, you can add words that you are familiar with, or words that you come across as you read, to the last column of the table.

Root	Meaning	Word
alter	other	alternate, alter ego
ami, amic	love	amiable, amicable
amphi	both ends or all sides	amphibian, amphitheater
ann, enni	year	anniversary, annual, biennial, perennial
anthrop	human, man	anthropology, anthropomorphic, misanthrope
aqua, aque	water	aquatic, aquarium, aqueduct
arch	chief, leader, ruler	archangel, monarch, archaic, archenemy



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aud	sound	auditorium, audible, audiologist, audiotape
bell	war	belligerent, bellicose
biblio	book	bibliography, bibliophile
bio	life	biography, autobiography, biology, antibiotic
brev	short	brief, abbreviate, brevity
cap	take, seize	capture, captivate, capacity
carn	meat	carnivorous
ced	yield, go	recede, secede, proceed, intercede, concession
chrom	color	chromatic, monochrome, polychrome
chron	time	chronicle, chronology, chronometer, synchronize
cogn	know	recognize, cognitive, incognito
cord/chord	cord	harpsichord
corp	body	corpus, corpse, corporal,
crac, crat	rule, ruler	aristocracy, autocrat, democracy, bureaucrat
cred	believe	credible, credulous, credibility, credit, credo, incredible
cruc	cross	crucifix, crucial
crusta	shell	crustacean
crypt	hidden	cryptogram, cryptology, cryptic
culp	guilt	culpable, culprit
dei	god	deity, deify
demo	people	demography, democracy, epidemic



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Root	Meaning	Word
derm	skin	dermatology, epidermis, hypodermic
dic	speak, say	dictate, predict, diction, indict
dox	belief, opinion	orthodoxy, paradox, heterodoxy
duc, duct	lead	induce, deduce, seduction, conduct, abduction
duo	two	duo
dynam	power	dynamo, dynamics
ego	self	egotist, egomania
equ	equal	equal, equity, equanimity, equate, equidistant
fac	make, do	manufacture, factory, benefactor
fil	threadlike	filament
frater	brother	fraternal, fraternize
gam-	marriage	monogamy, polygamy, bigamy
geo-	earth	geopolitical, geology, geography, geothermal
grad, gress	step	gradual, progression, transgression
graph	writing, printing	graphology, biography, telegraph, geography
gyn-	woman	gynecologist, androgynous, misogyny
hemo, hema, hem	blood	hemophilia, hematology, hemoglobin
holo	whole, entire	holograph
hydro, hydr	water	dehydrate, hydraulics, hydroelectric, hydroplane
ject	throw	inject, reject, subject, projection



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Root	Meaning	Word
leg, lect	read, choose	legible, lectern, lecturer, election
liter	letter	literature, illiterate, literal
loc	place	local, location
log	word	monologue, epilogue
luc	light	lucid, elucidate
magn	large	magnify, magnate, magnificent
man	hand	manufacture, manual, manuscript
mar	sea	marine, mariner
mat, mater	mother	maternal, maternity, matriarchy, matricide
meta	behind, between, beyond	metacognition, metaphysics
metri, meter	measure	geometric, thermometer, odometer
min	small	minority, minuscule, minute
mit, miss	send	permit, submission, mission, emit,
mob, mot, mov	move	mobile, automobile, motion, promote, movie
mon	warn	premonition, admonition
mor, mort	death	mortal, mortician, immortality
morph	form, structure	metamorphosis, amorphous, morphology
mut	change	mutant, mutability, mutate
neuro	nerve	neurology, neurosis, neuron
nomen, nomin	name	nominal, nominate, nomenclature
nov	new	novel, renovate, innovation



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Root	Meaning	Word
nym, onym	word, name	synonym, acronym, anonymous, pseudonym
odonto	tooth	orthodontist
ortho-	straight, correct	orthodox, orthodontist, orthopedic
pac	peace	pacify, pacifist
pater	father	paternal, paternity, patricide, patriotic
path	feeling, suffering	sympathy, apathy, empathy, telepathy, pathology
ped, pod	foot	pedal, pedometer, centipede, gastropod
pel, puls	push	pulsate, repulsive, impulse, compel, propel
pend	hang, weigh	append, depend, pendulum, pendant, suspend, pending
phon, phono	sound, voice	cacophony, euphony, phonograph, telephone,
plan	flat	planar, plantation, plane
pneum	lung	pneumatic, pneumonia
pod	feet	podiatrist, tripod
port	carry	portable, transport, portage, report
pot	power	potent, omnipotent, potentate
psych-	soul, spirit, mind	psychology, psychic
pug, pugna	fight	pugnacious, pugilist
quer, quis	ask	query, inquisition,
scent, scend	climb	ascend, ascent
schizo, schiz	division, split	schizophrenic, schism



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Root	Meaning	Word
sci	know	scientific
scrib, script	write	manuscript, scribe, scripture
sec, sect	cut	dissect, section
sed, sess	sit	sedentary, session
sens, sent	feel, be aware	sensible, sentient
sequ, secu	follow	sequence, sequel, consecutive
serv	serve, protect	service, servile
simil	same	similar, assimilate, simile, facsimile
siphon	tube	siphon
sol	sun	solar
son	sound	sonar, resonate, unison
soph	wisdom, knowledge	philosophy, sophomoric
spec, spic	look, see	spectacles, spectator, inauspicious, prospect
spir	coil	spiral
spir	breathe	inspire, respiration, conspire, perspiration
spond, spons	promise, answer for	respond, responsible
spont	by one's own force	spontaneous
stat	stand, position	station, status
tang, tact	touch	tangible, tactile
temp	time	temporary, temporize
ten	hold	tenable, tenant
ter, terr	earth	subterranean, terrain, terrestrial, disinter
theo	god, deity	theology, polytheism, atheist



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Root	Meaning	Word
therm-	heat	thermal, thermos, thermometer
trophy	nutrition, food	atrophy
uro	urine	urologist
vac	empty	vacuum, vacuous, vacant
ven, vent	come, go	intervene, convene, contravene
ver	truth	veracity, verify, verity
vert	turn	introvert, irreversible, vertigo
vit	life	vital, revitalize, vitamin
voc	call	revoke, invocation, vocal, evocative, convocation
zoo	animal	zoo, zoology, zoolatry

Now that you're familiar with common root words, we recommend that you continue with the handouts *Building Vocabulary: Common Prefixes* and *Building Vocabulary: Common Suffixes*.

Also, the handouts and *Understanding Dictionary Entries* and *Using the Dictionary: Word Origins* will help you in building your vocabulary by showing you how to use a dictionary and how to use a word's origin to develop a basic understanding of a word.



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