

## 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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| Root       | Meaning     | Word  |
|------------|-------------|---|
| 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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