

# 1 vocation /vo kay shun /vō kā' shən

A *vocation* is a person's main occupation, job, or employment.

It is often used in a religious sense to indicate a *calling* (inclination) to the ministry or priesthood. But it is also used to describe any occupation that requires dedication, such as nursing or teaching. It is not wrong to say that a plumber has a *vocation*, but plumbing is more often called a job, a trade, or a craft.

A *vocation* is usually a paid full-time occupation. In contrast, an *avocation* is usually a nonpaid, often part-time occupation or hobby. For example, watching birds and knowing about birds is an *avocation* for most people, but for an ornithologist (a scientist who studies birds) it is a *vocation*. The prefix *a-* in this case means "not."

**Root**  
**voc** means  
"call."

**vocabulary** – a collection of words, the number of words known by an individual, or words used in a particular subject area: "Music has its own *vocabulary*."

**vocal cords** – the part of the throat that makes sounds, a membrane that vibrates with the passage of air.

**vocalist** – a person who sings: "The band members who sing are its *vocalists*."

**vocalize** – to put into words or to speak: "She couldn't *vocalize* her real feelings."

**vociferous** – loud or insistent speech: "Blue Jays have a *vociferous* call."

**equivocate** – to speak on both sides of an issue, to avoid making a definite decision, not to make up one's mind. (*equi-* = equal)

## Activities

A girl who sings with a band

is a \_\_\_\_\_.

Someone who talks all the time and won't shut up is \_\_\_\_\_.

Name some actions that are *irrevocable* (that can't be undone).

If you don't get paid for doing it, it might be an \_\_\_\_\_.

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

**vo-ca-tion**

## 2 worst /werst /wûrst

The common meaning of *worst* is “very bad”—in fact, as bad as bad can get.

The adjective *bad* has three degrees. The first degree, *bad*, is known as the *positive* degree and is the simple and most commonly used form of the word. The next degree, *worse*, is known as the comparative degree. And finally, *worst* is known as the superlative degree. For example, “The storm was already bad, it got worse an hour later, but the next day it was the *worst* I have ever seen.”

Most adjectives are regular and are changed simply by adding a suffix, as in *big*, *bigger*, *biggest*. Only a few adjectives, such as *bad*, *worse*, and *worst*, are *irregular*. Other examples include:

good	better	best
many	more	most

Some tricky tests, such as the SAT, may use an obscure meaning for a common word. *Worst*, for example, may be used as a verb meaning “to defeat,” “to outdo,” or “to best in a debate or conflict”: “My attorney tried to *worst* the prosecution attorney” or “Our army was *worsted* (defeated) in the battle.”

### Activities

Here are some adjectives in the positive degree. Put them in the comparative and superlative degrees:

small	_____
	_____
dirty	_____
	_____
worried*	_____
	_____
many	_____
	_____

\*requires *more* or *most*

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

**worst**

### 3 catalyst /cat a list /kat' l ist

A *catalyst* is a substance that can cause a reaction. For example, some modern cars have a *catalyst* in the car engine exhaust muffler that causes some of the gas emitted from the engine's exhaust to be less toxic (harmful).

A *catalyst* can also be something that causes other kinds of change. For example, Congress could pass a bill (law) that would make it easier for people to have solar energy for their houses. Such a bill would be a *catalyst* for change from using power made by oil-fired electricity-generating plants to using free solar energy (sunshine) to make electricity. The solar generator uses silicon cells as *catalysts* for changing solar radiation into electricity. (-lyst = breakdown)

**Root**  
*cata* means  
"with."

**catastrophe** – a tragedy, disaster, or utter failure: "A hurricane is a *catastrophe*." (*trophe*- = turn) *Catastrophe* is an ancient Greek term meaning "The gods have turned against us."

**catalog** – a list or book of various items, such as a college *catalog* of courses or a store *catalog* of items for sale. (-log = word)

**catapult** – an ancient war machine for hurling stones. (*pult*- = hurl)

## Activities

Does *catalyst* have anything to do with cats?

Does *catalyst* have anything to do with hurricanes?

Does *catalyst* have anything to do with chemistry?

Does *catalyst* have anything to do with modern society?

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

**cat-a-lyst**

# 4 countervail /cown ter vail /koun' tər vāl'

The word *countervail* means “to oppose or exert a force against” something: “The enemy had a *countervailing* force protecting the river.” “*Countervailing* his tendency to love was his tendency to hate.”

*Countervail* also has another meaning: *to compensate or to make up for*. For example, “She *countervailed* for the tree damage by planting a new tree.”

**Root**  
counter means  
“against” or  
“opposite.”

**counterweight** – a weight equal or opposing: “An old scale had a *counterweight* and some elevators and windows had *counterweights*.” “The courts acted as a *counterweight* to the legislature.”

**counterthrust** – an opposing force: “Rockets and springs can exert a *counterthrust*.”

**counterview** – a view or argument from the opposite side.

**countermmand** – to recall or cancel an order.

**encounter** – to meet face-to-face, to meet the enemy, to come upon accidentally.

**counterclockwise** – movement from the top of a circle to the left, turning the opposite way a clock dial runs.

## Activities

In what other situations might you use *countervail*?

Draw a picture of the use of a *counterweight*.

Review: What does *counter-* mean?

If you *countermmand* an order, what does that mean?

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

**coun-ter-vail**

# 5 fluid /floo id /flōō' id

*Fluid* is a common word with several meanings:

1. a liquid substance (noun): "My car needed both *brake fluid* and *radiator fluid*."
2. not fixed, changing (adj.): "The battle lines were so *fluid* that they changed from day to day." "His opinion of the president was *fluid* and changed with every newspaper article."
3. a smooth or easy style (adj.): "The best dancers have very *fluid* movements."
4. easily converted to cash (adj.): "Government bonds are *fluid* and can be sold for cash any time you wish. They have *fluidity*."

**Root**  
*flu* comes  
from Latin and  
means "flow" or  
"blow."

All sorts of things are *fluid* and *flow*; besides water, gas *flows* through pipes to our stoves, electricity *flows* through copper wire to our lightbulbs, mud *flows* down wet mountain sides, and even ice *flows* down glaciers.

**flue** – a pipe for venting gases, as in a chimney; historically a *flue* was an open wooden or stone trough for carrying water.

**fluff** – a lightweight substance with air between the particles; you can *fluff* a food, such as whipped cream, or *fluff* up a pillow.

**flow** – current or movement of a liquid or gas: "Which way does the river *flow*?"

**affluent** – wealthy, rich, flowing in abundance.

## Activities

Name ten kinds of *fluid*.

What does *fluidity* mean?

Use *fluff* in several ways.

What else *flows* in addition to liquid?

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

**flu-id**

## 6 triad /try add /trī' ad

A *triad* is any group of three closely related things or people: "Those three political leaders are a *triad*; they all vote the same way." "A *triad* is a musical chord consisting of three tones."

**triangle** – a plane geometric figure with three angles and three sides.

**right triangle** – a triangle with one angle at 90 degrees.

**isosceles triangle** – a triangle with two sides of equal length.  
(*iso-* = equal)

**equilateral triangle** – a triangle with all sides of equal length.

[In some words, *-lateral* means "side." A *lateral pass* in football is a pass sideways rather than forward. A *lateral branch* is one that grows from the side of a main branch. Pipelines and electrical lines have *laterals* (lateral branches) coming off the main lines.]

**trident** – a three-tooth spear; a symbol of the sea god Neptune.

**tribe** – a large family or clan; related families; a group united under one chief; a group of animals. Historically, a *tribe* was a division of one third of the Roman people.

### Activities

Draw some differently shaped *right triangles*.

Draw some differently shaped *isosceles triangles*.

How many *laterals* does a *triangle* have?

What is the symbol for Neptune, the sea god?

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

tri-ad

**Root**  
*tri* means  
"three."

# 7 unemphatic /un em fat ik /un' em fat' ik

Do *unemphatic* and *unequivocal* /un ee kwiv ik ull/ mean the same thing? Heavens, no. To *equivocate* means to avoid making a decision or to speak on both sides of an issue, so *unequivocal* means your mind is made up—no more questioning or hesitation. *Unemphatic* means “without emphasis or strong meaning.” When you *emphasize* something, you call attention to it or put it in a position of importance; put *un-* in front of *emphatic* and it means *not emphatic*, or not important. “She spoke *unemphatically* when denying that she would run for office” (meaning she won’t run).

## Prefix

*un* is the most common prefix in the English language.

It means “not” or “opposite.” We see it in hundreds of words in the dictionary, such as:

unrest  
unwarlike

unconstitutional  
unchosen

ungraceful  
undressed

And it can *unofficially* be applied to many slang words:

uncool    unhip    unmacho

The prefix *in-* may also mean “not,” as in:

inattention    inaccurate    indirect

Also the prefix *im-* means “not,” as in:

impossible    impolite    improbable

And the prefix *ir-* means “not,” as in:

irregular    irresistible    irrelevant

## Activities

Is a person who cannot make up his or her mind *equivocal* or *unequivocal*?

List four prefixes that mean “not.”

When you don’t want to emphasize something, do you say it *emphatically* or *unemphatically*?

Try applying *un-* to a variety of words.

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

**un-em-phat-ic**

## 8 papyrus /puh py russ /pə pī' rəs

*Papyrus* is the name of a plant famous for growing along the banks of the Nile River in Egypt but that can also be found in many gardens in the United States, particularly those near or with a pond. *Papyrus* is a member of the sedge family, which is noted for having long stocks that are somewhat triangular (three-sided) rather than round.

Historically, *papyrus* was very important because two thousand years ago it was used to make writing paper. In fact, the word *paper* comes from *papyrus*. The ancient Egyptians cut the *papyrus* stalks into long strips and pressed them together to form the paper, which was sometimes made into a long strip and rolled up into a *scroll*. Later it was cut into pages and bound into book form, or *codex*. The codex was a great invention because it made it possible to write on both sides of the *papyrus* paper, and it was easier to use than a scroll.

The term *papyrus* also refers to specific books or manuscripts. For example, the Turin Papyrus of Kings, now housed in the Egyptian Museum in Turin, Italy, lists ancient Egyptian kings. Most of the books of the Bible were originally written on *papyrus*. The older, Jewish books (the Old Testament) were written on scrolls and the newer, Christian books (the New Testament) were usually written in a codex.

*Papyrus* was used as writing paper not only by the ancient Egyptians but also by the ancient Greeks and Romans (ancient Italians). People who study *papyrus* books are called *papyrologists*.

### Activities

Why did the ancient Egyptians write on *papyrus* instead of on paper?

Try writing your next story on a scroll.

Draw a picture of a *papyrus* plant.

What nationality are the ancient Romans called today?

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

**pa-py-rus**



## 9 crude /krewd /krōod

Does *crude* sound like *rude*?

Is there any relationship in meaning between the two words?

Yes, there certainly is. A person who is *rude* can also be called *crude*. A rude person is unpolished, impolite, not finished, such as somebody who cuts in front of you when you are in line, or somebody who interrupts your talking by speaking before you have finished. "It's both *rude* and *crude* to make insulting remarks about somebody's handicap."

But *crude* is not always an impolite word. Here are some other meanings:

**Root**  
*crudus* comes  
from Latin and  
means "raw" or  
"rough."

1. natural, raw, not refined: "Crude oil must be sent to a refinery."

2. made quickly or poorly, temporarily, hastily: "He lived in a *crude* cabin in the woods."

3. language or actions that are impolite, insulting, offensive: "He made *crude* jokes about minorities."

4. incomplete or not well thought out: "He had only a *crude* sketch for the building plan."

**recrudescent** – becoming raw again: "The sore on her foot was *recrudescent*." "There was *recrudescent* discontent among the workers before the strike."

### Activities

List five types of *crude* materials.

List five types of *rude* behavior.

Make a *crude* drawing of the floor plan of your bedroom.

What are some words that mean the opposite of *crude*?

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

**crude**

# 10 bedraggle /be drag gull /bi drag' əl

You should always look for the little word or root in long or unfamiliar words. In *bedraggle* we clearly see the word *drag*, and sure enough, that is part of the definition. If someone shows up at your door looking *bedraggled*, he looks as if he has been *dragged*. But he would also be *wet*. So if you say that after a rainstorm your dog looks “wet and *bedraggled*,” you are really repeating yourself.

*Bedraggle* also has another meaning and that is “to move slowly or perhaps even slovenly.” If your teacher takes you to the museum and tries to keep the group together, she might get a little annoyed if a few students *bedraggle*, that is, move to the rear and act as a *drag* for the whole group.

The prefix *be-* is a well-used Old English prefix that is attached to a lot of words. Shakespeare used it all the time and it is still in dozens of modern words.

*Be-* might be related to position, meaning “on” or “around,” as in *beside*, *behind*, *below*, and *beyond*.

*Be-* might help to change a noun into a verb, as in *befriend*, *behead*, *bedevil*, and *bewitch*.

*Be-* might also intensify or make a word stronger, as in *befuddle*, *berate*, and *beware*.

Here is a simple test to find out whether or not a word is a noun. If you can put “the” in front of the word, it is a noun. For example, you can’t say “the *befriend*,” but you can say, “The soldier befriended the young boy.” So the prefix *be-* does have a grammar use.

## Activities

Describe someone who looks *bedraggled*.

Have you ever seen someone *bedraggle* in a group?

Can you think of another word that uses the prefix *be-*?

**Syllabification for  
correct spelling**

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**be-drag-gle**