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INTRODUCTION

We use it almost every waking moment of our lives, but few of us know many details about the English language. The facts are plenty stunning, though:

> The number of English words, if you include scientific and technical terms, totals about 1 million. That makes it by far the wordiest of the world’s languages (by comparison, French has roughly 100,000 words).

> How did it get so big? Easy—by borrowing. Roughly 80 percent of English words are based on words from other languages.

> An estimated 750 million people speak English around the world. Of those 350 million consider it their mother tongue.

> The average educated English-speaking person knows about 20,000 words.

> The typical person uses just 2,000 of those words in a week.

It’s that last statistic that is most amazing to us. For all the reading, e-mailing, writing and talking we do in a week, you’d think we’d be a little richer in our word usage! So while we hope you find Ultimate Word Power to be fun and entertaining, we also hope you put it to good use. Here are 500 words that are fun to say, expressive, useful, and a notch above your everyday “Hello,” “What’s for dinner?” and “Pick your clothes up off the floor!”

Word Power has been a particularly popular feature in Reader’s Digest for several decades running, and today, the National Word Power Challenge is engaging hundreds of thousands of children in expanding their vocabulary. As our name implies, Reader’s Digest believes strongly in the pleasures and benefits of the written word. A rich vocabulary is the pathway to better ideas, a greater understanding of our world, and fuller communication with friends, family, and colleagues. So enjoy the 30 challenges on the pages ahead. And maybe, in a few weeks, your 2,000 words will suddenly be 2,500!
“They do not love that do not show their love,” wrote William Shakespeare. To inspire you to use the language of romance, this quiz is dedicated to words of passion. Choose the answer you think is best and check your results on the next page. And guys, even if you get all the words right, remember—romance goes beyond words. So don’t forget the roses!

ANSWERS:

1. **allure** —[C] Appeal; charm; as, the allure of her smile. Old French *alurer* (to attract; originally, a reference to the lure used by a falconer).

2. **woo** —[B] To court; seek the favor or love of; as, I wooed her for years. Middle English *wowe*.

3. **smitten** —[D] Strongly and suddenly infatuated or in love; as, She was smitten first by his looks. From *smite* (to hit hard).

4. **dulcinea** —[D] Sweetheart; lady-love; as, He had found his dulcinea. In the Cervantes novel, Don Quixote idealized the peasant girl Dulcinea.

5. **congenial** —[A] Compatible in character or nature; pleasant and agreeable. Latin *con-* (together) and *genialis* (productive, joyous).

6. **dalliance** —[B] Amorous, flirtatious play or act; as, True love is no mere dalliance. From *dally* (to act or talk playfully).

7. **sentient** —[C] Sensitive; capable of feeling; aware; as, For the first time he seemed more than just sentient. Latin *sentire* (to feel).

8. **myrtle** —[B] Symbol of love. The fragrant evergreen plant was considered sacred to Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty.

9. **fervent** —[C] Passionate; having great warmth and intensity; as, fervent desires. Latin (boiling).

10. **blandishment** —[A] Flattery; word or action that tries to coax; as, With frequent blandishments, he hoped to change her mind. Latin *blandus* (soothing).


12. **enamored** —[B] Filled with love; as, The student became enamored of the girl at the next desk. French *amour* (love).

13. **tryst** —[D] A secret meeting arranged by lovers; as, They rendezvoused for a midnight tryst. Middle English *triste* (appointed station in hunting).

14. **uxorious** —[B] Exceedingly devoted to one’s wife; as, My husband uxorious? Hardly! Latin *uxor* (wife).

15. **coquette** —[C] Flirtatious woman; as, At parties she’s always the coquette. French, from *coquet* (young rooster).

16. **concord** —[A] Harmony; agreement; as, a relationship marked by concord. From Latin *concors* (literally, hearts together).

17. **indelible** —[D] Permanent; unremovable; as, You occupy an indelible place in my heart. Latin *indelebilis* (indestructible).

18. **lothario** —[B] Seducer or rake; deceiver; as, Don’t lose your heart to that lothario. From a character in a 1703 play, *The Fair Penitent*.

19. **pine** —[D] To yearn; long; as, She pined for her absent lover. Middle English *pinen* (to torment).

20. **oscular** —[C] Pertaining to kissing; as, Valentine’s Day is perfect for some oscular activity. Latin *oscularum* (little mouth; kiss).

VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-14 Good  15-17 Excellent  18-20 Exceptional

ANSWERS

1. sugarplum — [C] Small candy in the shape of a ball or disc; sweetmeat. Please don't fill up on those sugarplums before dinner is served.

2. mesquite — [B] Wood of spiny trees or shrubs native to the southwestern United States that is often used for grilling food. To my mind, the best barbecued ribs have that authentic mesquite aroma.

3. effervescent — [A] Fizzy; giving off bubbles. She prefers seltzer to plain bottled water because it's effervescent.

4. ramekin — [A] A small baking dish for preparing individual portions. To make the perfect popovers, use ramekins instead of muffin tins.

5. gherkin — [D] A small cucumber used for pickling. I'll skip the potato chips, but a gherkin or two would go nicely with this sandwich.

6. julienne — [D] To cut into thin strips. Once you've peeled those carrots, would you please julienne them for the salad?

7. aspic — [A] A clear savory jelly. Let's leave time to prepare the traditional aspic in that odd hat-shaped mold my brother gave us.

8. stollen — [B] A sweet yeast bread of German origin containing fruit and nuts. That loaf of my mother's stollen I brought to work yesterday? I left it by the office coffee maker and it was gone in five minutes.

9. braise — [B] To cook slowly in fat and little moisture in a closed pot. The first step in making a successful beef stew: Braise the meat carefully.


11. shirr — [B] To bake until set. What makes those shirred eggs so tasty is the dollop of heavy cream he adds before putting them in the oven.


13. macerate — [C] To soften or separate by steeping in fluid. Blend the cranberries and oranges together until fine; add in sugar; then allow to macerate for two days until using.

14. viscous — [A] Resistant to flowing in a fluid or semifluid; thick, sticky. The hot fudge was so viscous that she had trouble getting it out of the jar and onto her ice cream.

15. latke — [D] Potato pancake. I always look forward to Hanukkah—not for the presents, but because I'll get all the latkes I can eat.

16. roux — [B] Cooked mixture of flour and fat used to thicken a soup or sauce. If you burn the roux, you better start over; otherwise, no one's going to want to eat your gumbo.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-12 Good 13-14 Excellent 15-16 Exceptional
Our nation, its welfare, and our relationships with other countries have been much on our minds lately. So it is an opportune time to review words that relate to citizenship, diplomacy and current events. The final word (number 15) was new to us—and it’s tough, but give it a try!


10. **casus belli** *n.*—an event that A: triggers a declaration of war. B: causes confusion. C: makes church bells ring. D: is an omen of good weather.


*Give yourself an extra 5 ratings points if you know this one!
ANSWERS

1. nationalism —[C] Patriotism; loyalty to one’s own nation; as, The rally in Washington was imbued with the spirit of nationalism.

2. unilateralist —[A] Someone who acts alone or on behalf of only one side, party or nation; as, Recent newspaper accounts have described President Bush as a unilateralist.

3. preempt —[A] To claim; forestall by acting first. From preemption, based on Latin praemere (buy beforehand).

4. stateless —[B] Lacking a nationality; as, Those who seek political asylum are sometimes stateless. From Latin status.

5. civitas —[A] Body of people constituting a politically organized community; as, Flags visually represent the civitas of a nation. Latin.

6. mandate —[D] Authorization to act, given to a representative by the electorate; any authoritative order or command. From Latin mandare (give as commission).

7. enfranchise —[C] To grant or admit to citizenship; to set free; as, Liberation movements seek to enfranchise the citizenry. From Middle French enfranchir (to free).

8. appeasement —[B] Yielding to often unreasonable demands; pacification; as, Allowing a dictator free rein is appeasement of the worst sort. Middle English apesen.

9. despotic —[D] Tyrannical; oppressive; as, Many Third World governments are despotic. From the Greek despotes (master).

10. casus belli —[A] An event that triggers or justifies a declaration of war; as, Pearl Harbor was a casus belli.

11. sanctions —[C] Punitive measures usually taken by several nations together, designed to put pressure on another country; also, approvals. Latin sancto.

12. consensus —[C] Collective opinion or judgment; as, It was the consensus we should act now. Latin consentire.

13. accord —[B] Diplomatic agreement without the binding force of a treaty; as, The Camp David accords were meant to be a framework for peace in the Middle East.

14. onus —[D] Obligation or task, especially a difficult one; as, The onus of peacekeeping around the world has often fallen to Americans. Latin (load, burden).

15. vexillology —[B] Study of flags; as, Someone with no background in vexillology may confuse the Irish and Italian flags. Latin vexill(um).
Back in a simpler time, the only cop lingo you had to know was “Book ’em, Danno.” It’s a lot tougher to follow the dialogue between the detectives and the DAs on “Law and Order” and the many other police shows that seem to dominate television these days. Here are some words to help you talk the talk.


ANSWERS

1. Mirandize —[B] To advise someone being arrested of his rights, under the Miranda rule, to remain silent and have an attorney present during questioning. From the U.S. Supreme Court decision Miranda v. Arizona.

2. appellant —[A] A person who makes a plea for judgment from a higher authority; as, The appellant hoped a technicality would void his verdict. Latin appellare (accost).

3. expedite —[D] To complete quickly or in a timely fashion; as, Defense motions made it impossible to expedite the trial. From Latin ex- (out) and pedis (foot), meaning to free feet from fetters.

4. skell —[B] Vagrant; police term for someone who looks like a drug user or seems down-and-out. Shortened form of skeleton.

5. recidivism —[D] Relapse into a former behavior, especially criminal activities. From Latin re- (back) and cadere (to fall).

6. arraign —[B] To bring before a court to hear and answer charges. Latin ad- (to) and ratio (reason).

7. backlog —[C] An accumulation of cases that the legal system is incapable of dealing with in a timely manner; as, Busy municipal courts often have a backlog of months.

8. adjudicate —[C] To determine or judge; as, His claim will be adjudicated. Latin ad- and judicare (judge).


10. recognizance —[C] A legal obligation or bond binding a person to appear for trial. Middle English.

11. remand —[C] To send a prisoner or accused person back into custody to await trial or further investigation; as, He was remanded to the county jail while the grand jury was selected. Old French remainder (to send word back).

12. bench warrant —[B] Order issued by a judge or court for an arrest; as, Worried the suspect might flee, the DA requested a bench warrant.

13. perpetrator —[B] A person who commits a crime; as, A SWAT team searched the abandoned building for the perpetrator. (In cop talk, shortened to perp.)

14. depose —[A] To affirm or testify under oath, often in writing; as, The witness was deposed beforehand. Old French deposer (to put down).

15. due process —[D] The course of legal proceedings that protect an individual’s rights and liberties; as, In democracies, citizens are entitled to due process of the law.

16. exculpatory —[D] Relating to vindication; tending to clear from guilt. Latin ex- and culpare (to blame).
It may be two weeks at the shore, or perhaps a grand tour of Europe, or something as simple as a long weekend with the grandparents. Whatever we choose, most of us sure love our vacations. Before you hit the road or fly the friendly skies, take our quiz of words you might need on holiday.

ANSWERS

1. **agoraphobia** —[C] Extreme fear of public places or crowds; as, My *agoraphobia* kept me housebound. Greek *agora* (marketplace).

2. **cay** —[B] Reef or low bank of coral or sand; as, We went snorkeling to explore the *cay*. Spanish *cayo*.

3. **amenities** —[A] Useful or desirable features of a place; as, a resort with impressive *amenities*. Latin *amoenus* (pleasant).

4. **halcyon** —[C] Idyllically happy; peaceful; as, the *halcyon* summers on Cape Cod. Greek *alkyon* (kingfisher), in legend a bird that could calm the seas.

5. **traipse** —[B] To walk aimlessly or wearily; wander; as, We *traipsed* all over town looking for an ATM. Of uncertain 16th-century origin.

6. **red-eye** —[D] Overnight flight; as, I took the *red-eye* to be at work on Monday morning.

7. **brasserie** —[C] Informal restaurant, usually with a selection of drinks. French, from *brasser* (to brew).

8. **queue** —[D] Waiting line; as, a *queue* that stretched for blocks. French, from Latin *cauda* (tail).


10. **baksheesh** —[A] In Egypt, a form of tip or bribe; as, A little *baksheesh* might get you in the museum a lot quicker. From Persian *bakhshidan* (to give).

11. **sultry** —[B] Sweltering; hot and humid; as, *sultry* August days. From Middle English *swelten* (to swoon away).

12. **antipodean** —[B] Directly opposite, especially in reference to sides of the earth; as, The *antipodean* day is the day gained when crossing the International Dateline. Greek *antipodes* (having the feet opposite).


14. **contraband** —[D] Goods that have been imported or exported illegally. From Italian *contra* (against) and *bando* (ban).

15. **tarn** —[B] Mountain lake; as, This trail through the woods leads to the *tarn*. Old Norse *tjörn* (literally, a hole filled with water).

16. **ambiance** —[C] Atmosphere; character; as, the hotel's luxurious *ambiance*. French (surroundings).

17. **incidentals** —[B] Minor expenses or items; as, Make sure you have cash for *incidentals*. From Latin *incidere* (to fall upon, happen to).

18. **estivate** —[D] To pass or spend the summer in a certain activity, especially (like some animals) in a dormant state; as, Snails *estivate*, but children shouldn’t. From Latin *aestivatus* (resided during summer).

VOCABULARY RATINGS
10-12 Good  13-15 Excellent  16-18 Exceptional
When life gets too fast and crazy, nothing puts things in perspective better than standing along the ocean's edge, watching the waves, listening to the gulls, feeling the sand and rocks beneath our feet. If only the words of oceanography were as calming! The Cousteau Society website (cousteau.org) helped us create this quiz by, um, deepening our ocean knowledge.


ANSWERS

1. **atoll** — [A] Coral island consisting of a reef surrounding a lagoon. Who wouldn't love to chuck it all and escape to an atoll in the Pacific?

2. **tack** — [B] Alter direction when sailing. If you see clouds on the horizon, it's time to tack toward shore—in a hurry.

3. **corolla** — [D] Flower petals; inner whorl of floral leaves. The corolla of each sea-grass flower was visible from the surface through the crystal-clear water.

4. **littoral** — [D] Relating to—or growing on or near—a shore, especially of the sea. What kind of strategies can we come up with to stop the further erosion of our littoral habitats?

5. **gestate** — [B] Carry in the uterus during pregnancy. Whales gestate for up to two years before giving birth.


7. **floe** — [C] Floating ice formed in a large sheet on the surface of a body of water. During harsh winters, the ice floes drifting south on the Hudson River can be immense.

8. **pelagic** — [C] Of, relating to, or living or occurring in the open sea. The pelican is among the best-known pelagic birds.

9. **scuttle** — [B] Sink or wreck, especially by making holes. They decided to scuttle the old ship to create an artificial reef.

10. **frond** — [D] Large leaf, usually on a palm or fern. On days when the heat gets unbearable, I like to fan myself with a palm frond.

11. **halyard** — [A] Rope used to hoist a sail. The captain ordered me to pull hard on the halyard as we prepared to leave the harbor for the open sea.

12. **mutate** — [C] Change. Pollution can cause harmless plants to mutate into toxic killers.

13. **piscatory** — [B] Relating to fish or fishing. That seafood chowder Frank whipped up last night was a piscatory delight.

14. **regenerate** — [C] Produce anew. Some experts believe our ocean fishing stocks are becoming too depleted to regenerate.

15. **osmosis** — [C] Movement of water molecules, via a membrane, from an area of low-salt concentration to one of high-salt concentration. While it may sound like a harmless process, osmosis can actually kill a freshwater fish placed in salt water.

16. **kelp** — [D] Large brown seaweed found in cold waters. I'm used to having kelp tangled around my legs when I'm swimming, not having it served to me in a salad.
We created this quiz using words from the new *American Heritage Science Dictionary*. We took it easy too—there’s nothing like a science dictionary for words as long as a sentence! Instead, we chose words that show up in everyday conversation but that aren’t quite common.

ANSWERS

1. bayou — [D] Sluggish, marshy stream linked to a river, lake or gulf. Let’s take my old boat out on the bayou.

2. fissure — [A] Narrow crack in a rock’s face. Clawing at the nearest fissure, I tried to pull myself up.

3. concave — [C] Curved inward, like the inside of a circle or sphere. My binoculars could use new concave lenses.


5. secrete — [D] To produce and discharge a substance. There are cells in the pancreas that secrete the hormone insulin.

6. absorption — [C] Process by which one substance, such as a solid, takes up or assimilates another substance, such as a liquid, through tiny pores or spaces between molecules. A paper towel will pick up that spilled milk by absorption.

7. proboscis — [D] Long snout or trunk; nose. We stared at the elephant’s proboscis as it swayed to and fro.

8. inoculate — [D] To introduce a vaccine or other agent into a body to create or hike immunity to a disease. The soldiers were inoculated against typhoid.

9. deciduous — [A] Shedding leaves at the end of a growing season and regrowing them at the beginning of the next season. When fall arrives and the rakes come out, I often wish I had fewer deciduous trees in my backyard.

10. tundra — [C] Cold, treeless, usually lowland area of far northern regions. I’m not sure that planning a picnic out on the tundra is a good idea.

11. slough — [B] To shed, as with an outer layer of skin. The kids got a kick out of watching that king cobra slough its skin.

12. simian — [A] Resembling or characteristic of apes or monkeys. I don’t know how the boss tolerates all of his scratching and other simian antics.

13. malleable — [D] Capable of being shaped when subject to pressure. Sculpting with iron, I was surprised to find out what a malleable substance it is when it’s hot.

14. berm — [C] Narrow, man-made shelf or ledge, typically at the top or bottom of a slope; man-made mound or wall of earth. If you must walk along the berm at the top of the dike, please be careful.

15. indigenous — [B] Native to a particular region or environment. I never thought black bears were indigenous to this area, but I’ve come across three of them rooting around in my trash cans in the past year.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

7-9 Good 10-12 Excellent 13-15 Exceptional
WEATHER WORDS

In the days before 24-hour weather reporting, hey, there was always the window. But back then we didn’t have Al Roker, esteemed forecaster and Quiz Master of RD’s National Word Power Challenge. We predict you’ll breeze through his weather-ese.

3. **dew point** *n.*—temperature to which air must be cooled to be A: comfortable to humans. B: saturated. C: moderately moist. D: able to form ice crystals.
ANSWERS

1. **barometer** — [B] Instrument used to measure atmospheric pressure. Low barometric pressure likely means clouds and rain. When pressure is high, air is forced closer to the ground, preventing clouds.

2. **convection** — [A] Transport of heat and moisture, especially by updrafts and downdrafts in an unstable atmosphere. Thunderstorms are one form of convection.

3. **dew point** — [B] Temperature to which air must be cooled to be saturated. In layman's terms, how much water is in the air compared with what it can hold. The dew point can indicate the likelihood of fog and thunderstorms.

4. **cirrus** — [A] Of clouds that are high (16,000 feet and more), delicate and wispy.

5. **UV index** — [C] Indicator of radiation, or exposure to ultraviolet rays. It's measured at noon, ranked from 0 to 15, and is highest on a clear summer day. Without sunscreen, you'll burn.

6. **Doppler radar** — [B] Equipment to measure radial velocity (motion) toward or away from the radar. The latest high-resolution Doppler is NEXRAD. It shows where precipitation is occurring, where it's going and how fast it's going there.

7. **cell** — [A] Air current; a single updraft, downdraft or couplet of both. It's often seen as a vertical dome, as in a towering cumulus cloud.

8. **Fujita scale** (F scale) — [B] Measure of wind damage intensity from F0 to F5. It ranks wind speed after the fact, based on damage. A very violent tornado might be an F3 (158-206 m.p.h.).

9. **cumulus** — [A] Of clouds with sharp outlines. They develop vertically as domes or towers and have rounded tops and horizontal bases. The top often looks like a cauliflower.

10. **jet stream** — [A, B, C & D] The jet stream is a horizontal, westerly flow of air that's normally found at high altitudes. Our weather is closely related to the position and strength of the jet stream.

11. **trough** — [C] Elongated area of low atmospheric pressure, also known as an upper-level low. Preceded by stormy weather and colder air at the surface.

12. **blizzard** — [C] Storm with dry, wind-driven snow. Commonly lots of storms are called blizzards, but technically they need to last at least 3 hours and reduce visibility to under 1 km to qualify.

13. **cold front** — [A] Transition zone between cold air that's advancing to replace warmer air. Also, the “leading edge” of a cold air mass.

14. **wind chill** — [B] Perceived cold. The difference between the actual temperature and how it feels when the wind is factored in. So if it's 17° out with a 10 m.p.h. wind, it feels like 5°.

15. **meteorology** — [A, B, C & D] All of these are part of the meteorologist's profession.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

8-10 Mild  11-12 Warm  13-15 Hot, Hot, Hot!
GARDENING WORDS

While not everyone enjoys the work it takes to have a beautiful yard, there are few who don’t appreciate beautiful flowers, soft, weed-free grass, and a bountiful garden. Savor, too, these words—all related to gardening and plants.

4. **biennial** n.—A: takes two years to grow. B: blooms twice a year. C: has two stems. D: blossoms in pairs.
1. **herbaceous** —[B] Green and leaflike, with soft, nonwoody tissues; as, **Herbaceous** plants die back to the roots at the end of the growing season. Latin *herbaceus* (grassy).

2. **leggy** —[C] Long and thin; straggly; as, Inadequate light can cause plants to grow tall and leggy.

3. **hybrid** —[D] Composite of two different species or varieties, especially when bred for a desirable trait. Latin *hybrida* (offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar).

4. **biennial** —[A] A plant that takes two years to complete its growth cycle; as, Flowering biennials usually bloom in the second season.

5. **leach** —[C] To dissolve out; as, Heavy rains have leached minerals from the soil. Old English *leccan* (to water).

6. **drip line** —[B] Perimeter of a tree where water drips from overhanging leaves; as, Fertilize a tree along the drip line.

7. **thatch** —[A] Buildup of dead grass between soil and lawn; as, Remove thatch so nutrients can reach the soil. Old English *theccan* (to cover).

8. **loam** —[D] Rich, balanced, fertile soil; as, **Loam** holds moisture well. Middle English *lam* (clay).

9. **variegated** —[B] Having streaks or spots of different colors; as, variegated ivy.

10. **heirloom** —[B] Vegetable variety from the 19th century, preserved by the passing of seeds from one generation to the next; as, **Heirlooms** are known for their robust flavor.

11. **sucker** —[D] Unwanted shoot from the stem or root that draws nutrients from the flower or fruit; as, Remove suckers from staked tomato plants.

12. **blanch** —[A] To exclude light by covering; as, Blanch endive to make the leaves more tender. Old French *blanchir* (to whiten).

13. **cultivar** —[C] Plant variety that has been produced and maintained by cultivation, rather than grown in the wild.

14. **dieback** —[B] Deterioration from the tips of branches or shoots caused by disease or pests, leading to the death of the plant.

15. **bolt** —[B] To produce seeds prematurely; as, Lettuce tends to bolt in midsummer heat. Old English (arrow).

16. **humus** —[C] Organic residue in soil; as, Topsoil is rich in humus. Latin (earth, ground).

17. **perennial** —[D] Plant that grows back year after year for three seasons or more. Latin *perennis* (through the year).

18. **deadhead** —[A] To remove faded or dead flowers; as, Deadhead plants to encourage further blooming.


20. **rhizome** —[A] Underground, horizontal stem that produces shoots and roots; as, Most common irises grow from rhizomes. Greek *rhiza* (root).

**VOCABULARY RATINGS**

10-14 Good  15-17 Excellent  18-20 Exceptional
BIRD WORDS

We listen to their songs, watch them soar, and marvel at their lives, but only a small percentage of us know many details about birds. That’s changing, though—backyard bird watching is one of America’s fastest-growing hobbies. These words will help your knowledge of birds take flight.

ANSWERS

1. plumage — [B] Feathers. You can always tell the cardinal by its distinctive red plumage.

2. forage — [C] To wander in search of food. Birds that don’t fly south for the winter must forage intensely once the snow comes.

3. fledgling — [D] Young bird; immature, inexperienced person. We were so happy to see the fledgling make his way back to the nest.

4. granivorous — [C] Feeding on grains or seeds. Would a granivorous bird like a handful of Cheerios?

5. clutch — [A] Nest of eggs; bunch or group. My son's class was surprised to come across a clutch of robins’ eggs during their nature walk today.

6. aquiline — [B] Of, relating to, resembling an eagle; curving like an eagle's beak. From this angle, she appears to have an extremely aquiline profile.


8. molt — [A] To shed, as with feathers, hair, shell, horns; to cast off. I am guessing that the bird will molt when it gets a bit older.

9. keratin — [C] Fibrous protein that serves as the outer layer of a bird's bill. Beneath the keratin cover, the parrot's beak has a bony frame.

10. chaparral — [A] Habitat composed of shrubby plants adapted to dry summers and moist winters. As cities along California's coast grow, chaparral is disappearing and some birds are struggling to survive.

11. frugivorous — [C] Feeding on fruit. I put some apple slices in the feeder for the frugivorous birds.

12. predation — [C] Act of plundering or preying. There are few displays of predation as dramatic as a peregrine falcon swooping in for the kill.

13. savanna — [D] Mixture of grasslands and scattered trees. You can expect to see finches living in savannas throughout the world.

14. diurnal — [B] Active chiefly in the daytime; recurring daily. She wakes up each morning to sounds of the diurnal birds in her backyard trees.

15. taxonomy — [C] Classification, esp. orderly classification of plants and animals according to their natural relationships. If you studied taxonomy, you'd know that blackbirds and orioles are closely related.

16. crest — [D] Tuft on the head of a bird or other animal; something suggesting an upper edge or limit. That kingfisher has a particularly shaggy crest, don't you think?

VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-12 Good 13-14 Excellent 15-16 Exceptional
Many people only focus on their financial condition around tax time. Still, you can dazzle your accountant with your command of high-finance jargon by learning these words of finance. Then drone on about your investment savvy until his eyes glaze over. He’ll be putty in your hands.


ANSWERS

1. zombie —[B] Insolvent company that is still doing business. You know ... the living dead. Zombies are an unwise investment.

2. default —[A] Fail to pay interest or principal when due. The IRS takes a dim view of taxpayers who default.

3. insider —[B] A person who has privileged, nonpublic information about a company. Corporate directors and officers are insiders.

4. teenie —[D] A measure of value (in the stock market) representing 1/16 (.0625) of a point. The difference between the opening and closing price of a stock is often just a teenie.

5. fiduciary —[A] A person or institution legally authorized to hold assets in trust for another and to manage them for the other’s benefit.


7. prospectus —[D] A formal business document with legal standing, laying out a company’s capitalization, sales projections and the like. Investors should study a prospectus before putting money into an IPO.

8. syndicate —[A] Consortium of bankers, insurers and others who temporarily work together on, say, an underwriting to spread the risk.


10. annuity —[B] In its fixed form, it’s an investment instrument that makes predetermined payments over a specific time period. A variable annuity has a minimum guarantee, but payments fluctuate.

11. hedge —[A] Invest to reduce the risk of adverse changes in the price of an asset. Investors often hedge when they’re unsure where the market’s going.

12. shelter —[B] Reduce taxes by choosing investments offering favorable tax treatment. The IRS closely watches those who shelter their income.

13. arbitrage —[D] Simultaneous sale and purchase of a security or commodity to profit from a price differential, often on different exchanges.

14. margin —[A] Use of borrowed money to purchase securities. In a margin account, the stocks you own are collateral for the loan. You could be forced to sell them if the market fell and you got a margin call.

15. OTC —[B] Of stocks unlisted on an exchange (over-the-counter). The NASDAQ is an OTC marketplace.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-11 Good 12-13 Excellent 14-15 Exceptional
Ever wonder how words are born? If so, check out *Word Histories and Mysteries* (American Heritage Dictionaries). This book probes the roots of dozens of words we toss around every day. We tossed 16 of them into this quiz.

ANSWERS

1. bumpkin —[B] Awkward, unsophisticated person.[Probably fr. Middle Dutch bommekijn, “little barrel,” or Flemish boomken, “shrub.”] What sort of bumpkin eats with his hands?

2. chortle —[D] To laugh or chuckle, esp. in satisfaction.[Coined by Lewis Carroll in Through the Looking Glass, 1872.] Having aced the midterm, he chortled at the teacher.

3. kiosk —[A] Small structure with one or more open sides, used for selling goods, services.[Fr. Turkish kösk, “pavilion.”] I get my gum at the kiosk near the bus stop.

4. filibuster —[C] Delay so as to prevent action, esp. in a legislative body.[Fr. Dutch vrijbuiter, “freebooter,” via Spanish filibustero.] Don't try to filibuster your way out of doing your chores.

5. dervish —[C] Member of Muslim order known to move as though entering a trance; one who dances with the same abandon.[Fr. Persian darvesh, “religious mendicant.”] She moved like a whirling dervish.

6. hobnob —[C] To associate familiarly; drink together.[Fr. Middle English hab or nab, “give or take.”] It’s time to hobnob with the bosses.

7. ilk —[A] Sort or kind.[Fr. Old English ilca, “same.”] I'm afraid I don't like to read books of that ilk.

8. dirge —[B] Song or hymn of grief.[Fr. Latin dirige, “direct.”] The sadness of the funeral dirge haunts me.

9. pariah —[B] Outcast.[Fr. Tamil paraiyan, “drummer” from lower class or caste.] The group may treat a new member like a pariah.

10. winsome —[B] Generally pleasing; cheerful.[Fr. Old English wynn, “joy.”] Your winsome expression tells me you're happy to see me.

11. caprice —[D] Impulsive notion.[Fr. Italian capriccio, “state of fright” in which one’s hairs stand up like those of a hedgehog.] Jetting off to Spain is the kind of caprice he’s known for.

12. pander —[A] To cater to others’ weaknesses.[Derived fr. Pandare in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde, “go-between in sexual intrigues, procurer.”] Don’t pander to the voters.


15. internecine —[C] Mutually destructive.[Fr. Latin internecinus, “murderous.”] The clash between the seniors and freshmen is the worst internecine dispute this school has seen.

16. zither —[D] Stringed instrument.[Fr. Latin cithara.] He’s a pretty good guitar player, but I’m not sure he’s ever tried his hand at the zither.

VOCABULARY RATINGS
10-12 Good 13-14 Excellent 15-16 Exceptional
WORDS FROM ANTIQUE GREECE

Thanks to their rotating summer and winter schedules, we are never more than two years away from the next Olympics. Which means it's always a good time to tackle words with roots in ancient Greece. Consider this quiz something of a vocabulary odyssey—and let the games begin.

ANSWERS

1. **cacophony** —{D} Harsh or discordant sound. How am I supposed to get to sleep with that constant cacophony coming from upstairs?

2. **oenophile** —{B} Lover or connoisseur of wine. You're known as such an oenophile that I'd rather let you pick the wine.

3. **spartan** —{B} Marked by simplicity, or avoidance of luxury. I'm ditching all my electronic devices and living a more spartan lifestyle.

4. **synthesize** —{C} To combine parts to form a whole. Try to synthesize your skills into an exciting new career.

5. **calisthenics** —{C} Systematic, rhythmic bodily exercises. Let’s do calisthenics every day before lunch to try to improve the children’s fitness.

6. **calliope** —{C} Keyboard instrument resembling an organ, consisting of whistles sounded by steam or compressed air. The carousel slowed to a stop, but the calliope played on.

7. **asphyxiate** —{D} To cause a lack of oxygen in the body, usually by interruption of breathing. I know you didn’t ask my opinion, but I think you should loosen that tie before you asphyxiate yourself.

8. **Arcadian** —{A} Idyllically pastoral, innocent or simple. Taking in the Arcadian view from the farmhouse porch, I decided I needed more time off before returning to the city.

9. **tautological** —{A} Redundant; containing needless repetition. “The giant was big” is a tautological statement, to say the least.

10. **panorama** —{D} Unobstructed or complete view of an area in every direction. You can’t beat the panorama from the top of the Empire State Building.

11. **paradigm** —{A} Example, especially an outstandingly clear or typical one. For a literary paradigm in the area of obsession, see Captain Ahab in Moby Dick.

12. **demagogue** —{A} To lead by using emotional appeals and popular prejudices. Why is he trying to demagogue his way to victory if he knows it’s wrong?

13. **onomatopoeic** —{A} Related to the use of words whose sound suggest their sense. Terms like buzz and hiss give her poetry an onomatopoeic quality.

14. **ethos** —{C} Distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature or guiding beliefs. The idea of cheating in any way offends my personal ethos.

15. **euphoric** —{B} Elated. The euphoric smile on my face is there because I just found out I’m getting a raise.

16. **synchronize** —{D} Make happen or exist at precisely the same time. Let’s synchronize our departures so we both get to the stadium at 6:30.
WORDS FROM GAELIC

Sláinte is táinte! (slawn-chuh iss tawn-chuh!) That’s an Irish toast to your health and wealth. That might be a new expression for you, but you’ll likely be surprised by the number of words that made their way into English from Gaelic, the parent language of Irish and Scots Gaelic. Here are 17 good ones.

ANSWERS

1. **keen** — [D] To wail in lament for the dead; as, While the bagpipes played, the *keening* widow was led from the church. As an adjective, keen means acute or piercing. From the Irish *caoine* (lament).

2. **smidgen** — [C] A small amount; as, The photographer asked the girl to move a *smidgen* to the left. From Gaelic *smidin* or *smitch* (small amount or insignificant person).

3. **bard** — [D] Once, a person who wrote and recited epic poetry; today, an accomplished poet. From *bàrd* (poet of a certain rank).

4. **cairn** — [B] A pile of stones set up as a monument or landmark. From *càrn* (heap, pile).

5. **smithereens** — [D] Small pieces; as, The mirror was broken into *smithereens*. From the Irish *smidiríní* (fragment, little bits).

6. **glom** — [A] To catch or grab; to steal. From *glam* (snatch at, grab).

7. **galore** — [C] In plentiful amounts; as, The victory was celebrated with food and drink *galore*. Irish *go leor*, Gaelic *gu leòr* (enough, plenty).

8. **dour** — [A] Sullen; gloomy; as, The headmaster had a *dour* disposition. Gaelic *dùr* (rough and rocky land), borrowed from the Latin *durus* (hard and severe).

9. **reel** — [B] To sway from a blow or shock, often as in dizziness; as, Her mind *reeled* at her husband’s accusation. Also, as a noun, a Celtic dance. Gaelic *righil*.

10. **blather** — [D] To talk foolishly or babble; as, He *blathered* on, making feeble excuses. Gaelic *blether* or *bladar* (chatter).

11. **brogue** — [B] Sturdy shoe (and originally a peasant’s heavy shoe); also, strong Irish accent in the pronunciation of English. Irish *bróg* (shoe).


13. **kibosh** — [C] Nonsense; most often used in the phrase “put the kibosh on,” meaning put an end to. Perhaps from Gaelic *cie báis* (cap of death). *Kye-bosh* was used in Dickens’s *Sketches of Boz*, 1836.

14. **slew** — [A] A large number or quantity; as, A *slew* of people waited for the mayor-elect to arrive. From Irish *sluagh* (crowd or army).

15. **glean** — [D] To gather, learn, find out; as, The detective tried to *glean* clues from the crime scene. From Old Irish *do-glenn* (he gathers).

16. **hooligan** — [A] A young thug or street hoodlum. From Irish surname *Houlihan* or *O hUallachain*. An 1890s music-hall song about the rowdy Hooligan family was popular at the same time that a street gang of that name terrorized London.

17. **slogan** — [C] A distinctive phrase often associated with a product or political party; as, Eisenhower campaigners wore buttons with the slogan “I Like Ike.” From Irish *slogorne* (battle cry), Gaelic *sluagh ghairm* (army cry; call to the multitude).

VOCABULARY RATINGS

11-13 Good  14-15 Excellent  16-17 Exceptional
WORDS THAT START WITH “QU”

We wanted to think up a quirky quiz, something a little queer and quixotic, and it came to us! Here are 16 words that start with “qu”—some common, some quite challenging. But don’t quit!

15. quail v.—A: to cry loudly. B: shiver from the cold. C: feel under the weather. D: lose heart.
ANSWERS

1. quisling—[A] Traitor; someone who double-crosses his country by aiding an invading enemy. After Vidkun Quisling, the Norwegian politician who betrayed his country to the Nazis and became its puppet ruler.

2. quiddity—[C] Fine point or subtle distinction in an argument; as, The professor’s erudition made it difficult to grasp the quiddity of his lecture. Latin quidditas (essence of a thing).

3. query—[B] To question, ask about; as, Few people queried his absence from the office. Latin quaere.

4. quidnunc—[C] Busybody; person eager to know the latest news and gossip; as, Our chatty barber is also the local quidnunc. Latin, literally “what now?”

5. querulous—[D] Full of complaints; given to finding fault; as, He was annoyed with all her querulous remarks. Latin queri (to complain).

6. quizzical—[A] Comical; also, puzzled. As the little girl took a bite of spinach, the quizzical look on her face made her family laugh.

7. quintessence—[D] The purest essence or form of a thing. In ancient philosophy, the fifth essence was believed to compose the heavenly bodies. Latin quinta (fifth) essentialia (essence).

8. quasar—[A] Celestial object that emits powerful light and radio waves from beyond our galaxy. Originally an acronym coined in the 1960s from quasi-stellar object.

9. quandary—[B] Dilemma; state of uncertainty; as, Difficult decisions can often leave one in a quandary. Unknown origin.

10. quiescent—[C] Inactive, at rest; as, A winter landscape often appears quiescent. Latin, from the present participle of quiescere (to rest).

11. quixotic—[A] Impractical; foolishly idealistic, like Don Quixote, hero of the Cervantes novel, who tries in a chivalrous but unrealistic way to rescue the oppressed and fight evil; as, Some people consider Ralph Nader to be a quixotic crusader.

12. quell—[D] To suppress, silence; as, The police were called to quell the disturbance in the neighborhood. Old English cwellan (to kill).

13. quibble—[A] To bicker or complain about trivial matters; as, With all the couple’s quibbling, it’s a wonder they’re still together. From Latin quis (who) and then quibus (by what things), which gave rise to the noun form of quibble (equivocation).

14. quorum—[C] A majority, in most cases; the number of members of a group required to be present to conduct official business; as, Without a quorum, the board of directors couldn’t pass the resolution.

15. quail—[D] To lose heart or courage in the face of difficulties or danger; as, A Doberman will not quail from an intruder. Middle Dutch quelen (suffer, be ill).


VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-12 Good 13-14 Excellent 15-16 Exceptional
WORDS THAT CONTAIN "TEN"

Let us honor the number ten by challenging ourselves with words that begin or end with it. Listen for the ten in everyday words: Often it's shy and silent, but other times it's bold, demanding your attention.

ANSWERS

1. tenacious —[C] Persistent in adhering to something valued or habitual; highly retentive; as, a tenacious memory. Latin tenax (holding fast).

2. chasten —[B] Scold; punish with the aim of correcting or improving; also, to purify; as, Reward humility, chasten pridefulness. Old French chastier.

3. tendentious —[A] Biased; favoring or promoting a point of view; as, Talk-show hosts often take a tendentious approach to topics. Latin tendentia (tendency).

4. molten —[D] Liquefied by heat; as, Molten lava from Hawaii’s Kilauea volcano is a constant threat to nearby homes. From Greek meldein (to melt).

5. tenor —[B] Purport; drift or general meaning; also, the second highest range of the male singing voice; as, The tenor of the President’s speech was patriotic. Latin tenere (to hold).

6. tauten —[D] To tighten or pull close together. Old English togian (to pull).

7. marten —[B] Member of the weasel family, which lives in northern forests and is prized for its fur. Middle English martren.

8. tensile —[A] Capable of being stretched or drawn out; as, Plastics are tested for tensile strength. Latin tensus.

9. tenuous —[D] Flimsy; lacking a sound basis; as, The judge dismissed the lawsuit because of tenuous evidence. Latin tenuitas (thinness).

10. christen —[A] To name; dedicate; baptize; as, The owner christened his yacht with a bottle of Dom Pérignon. Old English cristen.

11. tendril —[C] Threadlike, often spiral part of a climbing plant used for support; as, Tendrils from a pumpkin covered the garden fence. Middle French tendron (a sprout).

12. batten —[B] Board or strip of wood used on sailboats and in construction to span joints or reinforce. Middle English batent (finished board).

13. tenet —[C] Any doctrine, principle or opinion held as true by a group; as, the tenets of conservatism. From Latin tenere (to hold).

14. hearten —[D] Encourage; cheer up; as, Your kind words heartened me. Middle English herte.

15. tender —[A] To make an official offer; present formally for acceptance; as, to tender one’s resignation.

16. heighten —[C] Intensify; increase; as, Musical scores helped heighten suspense in Hitchcock films. From Old English hiehtho.

17. tenderfoot —[B] Novice; raw, inexperienced person; also, newcomer to ranching or mining lands in the Old West.

VOCABULARY RATINGS
10-13 Good 14-15 Excellent 16-17 Exceptional
ADVERBS

Here we spotlight the most versatile modifiers in the English language—the adroit adverbs. They usually wear an -ly ending like an ID badge and stand ready and able to intensify verbs, amplify adjectives or even rev up other adverbs.

ANSWERS

1. jauntily —[B] In a lively manner; lightly; as, The actor stepped jauntily onto the stage. From French gentil (noble, gentle).

2. wantonly —[C] Unjustifiably; recklessly; as, They wantonly disregard my advice. Middle English wantowen (undisciplined).

3. contritely —[C] Humbly; with remorse and regret; as, She sighed contritely over her error. From Latin contritus (worn down).

4. pusillanimously —[D] Timidly; in a faint-hearted way; as, He left the room pusillanimously at the first hint of discord. Latin pusillus (very small) and animus (spirit).

5. manifestly —[C] Plainly; in a way that is easily understood; as, a manifestly wise decision. Latin manifestus (literally, struck with the hand).

6. ignominiously —[D] Dishonorably; with disgrace; as, to retreat ignominiously. Latin ignominia (literally, depriving of one's name).

7. unequivocally —[B] Conclusively; without conditions; as, I support him unequivocally. From un- (not) and Latinaequivocus (ambiguous).

8. meretriciously —[B] Deceptively; in an insincere or vulgar way; as, He argued meretriciously. Latin meretríx (prostitute).

9. obsequiously —[D] Like a servant; obediently; as, The staff was obsequiously attendant to their boss's needs. Latin obsequi (to yield).

10. profusely —[B] Without limitation; extravagantly; as, She praised the policeman profusely. Latin profundi (to pour forth).

11. inscrutably —[C] Mysteriously; in an incomprehensible way; as, The judge gazed inscrutably at the jury.

12. eminently —[C] Very; to a high degree; as, She is eminently qualified. Latineminere (to stand out).

13. expeditiously —[C] In an efficient way; speedily; as, We reached our destination expeditiously. Latin expedire (literally, to free the feet, as from a trap).

14. egregiously —[B] Extremely; in a notorious or glaring fashion; as, His behavior was egregiously selfish. Latin egregius (preeminent).

15. indubitably —[C] Without question or doubt; as, indubitably true.

16. decorously —[B] Politely; with proper manners; as, The audience applauded decorously. Latin decor (grace, beauty).

17. blithely —[D] Cheerfully; in a lighthearted, carefree way; as, Children blithely ignore our cautions.

18. vicariously —[B] By substitute; through the experience of another; as, vicariously thrilling. Latinvicarius (substituting).

19. utterly —[C] Fully; to a total extent; as, The house was utterly ruined. Middle English utter (outward).

20. preposterously —[A] Absurdly; ridiculously; as, He was preposterously underdressed for the occasion. Latinpraeposterus (literally, with the back part forward).

VOCABULARY RATINGS
10-14 Good 15-17 Excellent 18-20 Exceptional
### COMMONLY MISPRONOUNCED WORDS

What a difference one little letter (or two) makes—between saying something correctly and putting your foot in your mouth! This quiz consists of commonly mispronounced words. The wrong—but popular—way to say them is in parentheses next to the word. (And in a few cases, the “wrong” way is in the dictionary.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>affidavit</td>
<td>affadavid</td>
<td>summons. statement. religious tract. court order.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>lambaste</td>
<td>lambast</td>
<td>to shear wool. stitch. berate. saturate.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>miniature</td>
<td>miniture</td>
<td>shriveled up. microscopic. reduced. invisible.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>liable</td>
<td>libel</td>
<td>flexible. dishonest. at fault. responsible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>orient</td>
<td>orientate</td>
<td>to remain still. adjust. look skyward. spin around.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>peremptory</td>
<td>preemptory</td>
<td>final. interrupted. required. depleted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>barbiturate</td>
<td>barbituate</td>
<td>tonic. sharp object. sedative. cleaning agent.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>dilate</td>
<td>dialate</td>
<td>stall. expand. swell. contract.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>pernickety</td>
<td>persnickety</td>
<td>spiteful. fussy. wholesome. greedy.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>tenterhooks</td>
<td>tenderhooks</td>
<td>nails that hold. meat. flags. clothing. plants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>candidate</td>
<td>cannidate</td>
<td>opponent. seeker. revealing photo. apology.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>founder</td>
<td>flounder</td>
<td>to swim poorly. stumble. discover. forget.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>asterisk</td>
<td>asterik</td>
<td>danger. space rock. computer chip. starlike mark.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>prerogative</td>
<td>perogative</td>
<td>opinion. wealth. privilege. knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>relevant</td>
<td>revelant</td>
<td>enlightening. boisterous. important. relating to.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>excerpt</td>
<td>excerpt</td>
<td>plagiarism. selection. bestseller. omission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>recur</td>
<td>reoccur</td>
<td>to agree. heal. happen. pester.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
ANSWERS

1. **cardsharp** — [A] Professional cheater at cards; as, Saloons of the Old West were full of cardsharps.


3. **lambaste** — [C] Berate; scold; also beat or whip soundly; as, The mayor *lambasted* the crooked police chief. Of Scandinavian origin.

4. **miniature** — [C] Reduced; on small scale. Originally, small pictures in medieval manuscripts. Latin *miniare* (to color with red lead).

5. **liable** — [D] Responsible; legally obligated; likely to suffer from; as, Manufacturers are liable for product defects. Old French *lier* (to bind).

6. **orient** — [B] To adjust to one’s circumstances or surroundings, especially in reference to the east. Latin *orients* (sunrise).

7. **peremptory** — [A] Final; leaving no opportunity for debate or denial; as, her peremptory refusal to share custody. Latin *perimere* (to destroy).

8. **barbiturate** — [C] Sedative; hypnotic drug; as, Doctors may prescribe *barbiturates* to treat insomnia.

9. **dilate** — [B] To expand; make wider; as, Her eyes *dilated* with surprise. Latin *dilatere* (spread out).

10. **pernickety** — [B] Fussy; hard to please; meticulous; as, Editors are known to be *pernickety* about grammar. Scottish.

11. **tenterhooks** — [C] Hooks or bent nails on a framework that hold cloth taut for setting and drying. Often used to signify tension or suspense; as, The murder mystery kept him on *tenterhooks*. French *tendre* (to stretch).

12. **candidate** — [B] Seeker of office; someone vying for a position or selected for an honor; as, the best *candidate* for the job. Latin *candidus* (white), a reference to the togas worn by office seekers in ancient Rome.

13. **founder** — [B] Stumble; fail utterly; to fill with water and sink as with ships; as, The project *foundered*. Old French *fondrer* (fall to the bottom).

14. **asterisk** — [D] Small starlike symbol used in writing and printing as a reference mark, omission, etc. From the Greek *aster* (star).

15. **prerogative** — [C] Privilege or right by virtue of rank or position; as, woman’s *prerogative* to change her mind. Latin (voting first).

16. **relevant** — [D] Relating to the matter at hand; pertinent; as, information *relevant* to the case. Latin *relevare* (to lift up).


18. **recur** — [C] To happen again; return to mind, as *recurring* thoughts of one’s first love. Latin *recurrere* (to run back).

VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-12 Good  13-15 Excellent  16-18 Exceptional
WONDERFUL WORD PAIRS

Some words have been together so long they’re like old married folks. Where would hunky be without dory? High and dry, that’s where! In this quiz we’ve gathered the Fred and Gingers of our language.

ANSWERS

1. **cut and run** — [C] Depart; leave hastily; as, Hosts don't like guests who cut and run. From the days when ships had ropes of hemp. To leave a mooring quickly, a sailor could cut the vessel's anchor rope.

2. **flotsam and jetsam** — [B] Useless items; odds and ends. Literally, cargo thrown overboard. Old French floter (to float) and Latin jactare (to throw).

3. **talk turkey** — [B] To speak candidly, frankly. Possibly from talks between Indians and settlers about the wild turkey supply, or from hunters mimicking bird sounds.


5. **red herring** — [C] Misleading clue; diversion; also, a financial prospectus issued before an IPO. From the practice of dragging a fish across a trail to mislead fox hunting dogs.

6. **yin and yang** — [A] Principles of harmony and balance. In Chinese philosophy, yin represents the negative, dark and feminine; yang, the positive, bright and masculine. Opposite yet complementary, their interaction influences our destiny.

7. **mumbo jumbo** — [A] Babble; senseless language meant to confuse; also, an incantation. From a West African word for a masked figure.

8. **hammer and tongs** — [D] Vigorously; with great energy and determination; as, He went at the project hammer and tongs. Reflecting the use of a blacksmith’s main tools.

9. **hue and cry** — [D] Public clamor or outcry; as, a hue and cry against the war. Historically, those in pursuit of felons were obliged to shout or cry out if they spotted the culprit. Anglo-French hu et cri.

10. **dark horse** — [A] Long shot; an almost unknown contestant regarded by just a few as the likely winner; as, Being a dark horse candidate, the politician’s odds of media coverage were slim. A horse-racing term.

11. **nip and tuck** — [A] Closely contested; equally likely to win or lose; as, The two boys were nip and tuck in the spelling bee.

12. **lion’s share** — [B] The biggest and best part, or the entire thing; as, According to the will, the oldest daughter gets the lion’s share of the inheritance. From the Aesop’s fable in which the lion takes all the spoils of a hunt.

13. **hem and haw** — [D] To hesitate while talking; speak noncommittally; as, He hemmed and hawed to avoid answering. Originating in the 17th century, this term echoed the sound of someone clearing his throat (as in Ahem!) and then stammering to find the right words.

14. **cloud nine** — [D] State of exaltation or euphoria; as, I’ve been on cloud nine since hearing the good news. Supposedly a meteorological term for the cumulonimbus cloud, which stretches vertically to great heights.

15. **sticky wicket** — [C] Awkward situation. In cricket, a wicket is the set of sticks in the ground at which the bowler aims the ball. This area becomes “sticky” and difficult to play in during damp weather.

**VOCABULARY RATINGS**

10-12 Good  12-13 Excellent  14-15 Exceptional
SMALL WORDS WITH BIG MEANINGS

You’ve likely heard the expression “Big things come in little packages.” For proof, consider these puny but powerful words. Despite having just three or four letters, these words add oomph to sentences like hot sauces add spark to food.


ANSWERS

1. **mote** (rhymes with moat) — [C] Small speck or particle, especially of dust; as, Oscar was a slob and Felix despised every mote of dust.

2. **coy** (rhymes with Roy) — [B] Modest; affectedly shy or reserved; as, She was coy about whether she and her boyfriend planned marriage.

3. **jibe** — [A] Be in harmony or agree; as, Reports of the housing market’s decline don’t jibe with the facts.

4. **crux** — [D] Main point; heart of the matter; as, The district attorney quickly got to the crux of his closing argument.

5. **mete** (rhymes with meet) — [C] Distribute; apportion by measure; as, A will metes assets to heirs.

6. **faux** (rhymes with foe) — [D] Artificial; fake; as, Some people wear faux fur for ideological reasons. But a faux pas is a socially embarrassing mistake.

7. **opus** (oh pis) — [A] Artistic composition, usually numbered in music; literary work; as, The author labored at his 1,000-page opus for 10 years.

8. **noir** (nu ar) — [A] Bleakly pessimistic; dark; as, Grim films are called cinema noir. French for “black.”

9. **tic** — [C] Sudden spasm or muscular contraction; as, Facial tics are very common.

10. **ergo** (ur go) — [D] Therefore; as, I think, ergo I am (Cogito ergo sum). A Latin word, most commonly found in legal and scientific documents.

11. **mar** — [A] Damage the attractiveness or appeal of someone or something; as, The antique armoire was marred by several deep gouges.

12. **pall** (rhymes with fall) — [B] Become tiresome; make dull or distasteful; as, The novelty of my job palled after a few weeks of commuting.

13. **apt** — [D] Likely, prone; suitable for the purpose; as, an apt remark. Also, quick to learn, bright.

14. **glib** — [A] Readily fluent, often insincerely so; quick with a response; as, The crowd at the town meeting found the mayor’s assurances too glib.

15. **gawk** (rhymes with walk) — [B] Stare stupidly; gape; as, It’s hard not to gawk at celebrities you see.

16. **wry** (rhymes with rye) — [B] Twisted or lopsided; bitingly ironic or amusing; as, a wry smile.

17. **rout** (rhymes with doubt) — [A] Overwhelming defeat; as, The primary was a rout for the incumbent. As a verb, to beat decisively; also, to root out or find by searching.

18. **boor** (rhymes with poor) — [C] Rude, unmannerly person; as, Only a boor would ignore a dinner invitation.

VOCABULARY RATINGS
10-12 Good  13-15 Excellent  16-18 Exceptional
PHRASES DRAWN FROM THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

Take a walk on the wild side and test your knowledge of these words and phrases that all have connections to the animal kingdom. And don’t be dismayed—their bark is worse than their bite.

ANSWERS

1. buffalo — [B] To baffle; overawe; intimidate by show of power; as, The lawyer tried to buffalo the witness. From the noun; perhaps taken from the verb “cow,” to frighten.

2. dogged — [C] Stubbornly tenacious; persistent in effort; as, The detective was dogged in following leads.

3. white elephant — [D] Possession that is a burden or hard to get rid of. From tales that kings of Siam gave such animals as gifts, the upkeep of which was meant to ruin the recipients.

4. phoenix — [C] Survivor; remarkable person. In mythology, a unique bird that lived for centuries, burned on a funeral pyre and rose from the ashes to live again.

5. pecking order — [D] Hierarchy of authority or status; as, the manager’s position in the pecking order. From behavior among birds.


7. eat crow — [C] To admit a mistake; accept humiliating defeat; as, If I’m wrong, I’ll eat crow. Thought to be based on a crow-eating incident during the War of 1812.

8. jackal — [D] Flunky; accomplice, especially in disreputable acts. From the animal, which feeds on carrion and hunts in packs.

9. lupine — [D] Savage; vicious; wolf-like; as, A lupine struggle to succeed the CEO ensued. Latin lupus (wolf).

10. duck soup — [B] Easy task or assignment. Unfortunately, tracing the history of the phrase is not duck soup. Its origins are unclear.

11. bevy — [A] Large group; as, a bevy of beauties on the runway. Originally, a reference to quails closely gathered on the ground.

12. loaded for bear — [C] Fully prepared, especially for confrontation; as, He went to the meeting loaded for bear. Bear hunters took maximum powder and shot for their firearms.

13. greenhorn — [D] Inexperienced person; raw recruit; novice. Originally, a young ox with new, or “green,” horns.


15. lionize — [A] Treat as a celebrity or object of interest; as, The dinner was meant to lionize the mayor.

16. brood — [B] To think deeply; dwell on; worry; as, She brooded over her growing debts. Figurative use based on the sense of birds sitting on eggs.

17. ferret — [A] To search; rummage; as, ferret around the desk. From the use of the animal in hunting rabbits.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-13 Good  14-15 Excellent  16-17 Exceptional
EMBELLISHMENT WORDS

It's not bad advice to avoid using a $5 word when a 50¢ word will do. But every now and then, a big word is just the thing to embellish your correspondence or conversation. Here are 15 to try.

ANSWERS

1. **serendipity** —[B] Luck in finding something accidentally; as, the serendipity of getting the first job you apply for. Coined by English author Horace Walpole after heroes of the Persian fairy tale *The Three Princes of Serendip* (Sri Lanka), who make lucky discoveries.

2. **twee** —[D] Dainty; quaint; affectingly clever; as, It was a twee room, the way it was decorated with pillows and doilies. British expression, from children’s pronunciation of “sweet.”

3. **ingratiate** —[C] To seek favor by getting into someone’s good graces; as, You’d be wise to ingratiate yourself with the new boss. Latin in gratiam (for the favor of).

4. **panache** —[C] Flamboyance; grand manner; also, a plume of feathers or tassels on a helmet; as, Liberace dressed with panache. Latin pinna (feather, wing).

5. **feckless** —[B] Ineffective; incompetent; having no sense of responsibility; as, His feckless attempts to fix the roof showed his lack of interest. Of Scottish origin, from combination of “effect” and “less.”

6. **quotidian** —[A] Everyday; recurring daily; as, Stockbrokers are eager for their quotidian market reports. Latin cottidi.

7. **hector** —[A] To browbeat; bully; harass. Name of the Trojan War hero, later slain by the Greek warrior Achilles to avenge the death of his friend Patroclus.

8. **donnybrook** —[C] Brawl; free-for-all; as, An argument can sometimes escalate into a donnybrook. Named after a Dublin, Ireland, suburb, which until 1855 hosted a fair constantly fraught with rowdiness.

9. **sybaritic** —[C] Self-indulgent; desiring of luxury; as, For many, the ’80s was a decade of sybaritic pleasures. From Sybaris, an ancient Greek city in southern Italy known for its wealth and extravagance.

10. **flummery** —[D] Nonsense; empty compliment; also, any soft food, especially custard or gruel. Welsh llymru (soured oatmeal).

11. **penultimate** —[C] Next to last; as, the penultimate position on the race track. Latin paene (almost) and ultimus (last).

12. **lugubrious** —[D] Mournful or very sad, especially to the point of being ridiculous; as, Their lugubrious conversation seemed out of place at the party. Latin lugere (to mourn).

13. **preen** —[B] Primp; dress smartly; also, of birds, to clean and trim feathers with the beak. Middle English preonen (to prick with a pin).

14. **puckish** —[D] Full of mischief; impish; as, I won’t tolerate any more of your puckish behavior! In English folklore, Puck is a troublemaking sprite. Middle English puke (devil).

15. **chortle** —[A] To chuckle or snort gleefully; as, The comedian was a hit, drawing many chortles from the crowd. Coined by English writer Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass*, probably a combination of “chuckle” and “snort.”

**VOCABULARY RATINGS**

- **9-11** Good
- **12-13** Excellent
- **14-15** Exceptional
"HIP" KID WORDS

Do you have one-way conversations with teenagers because you have no idea what they're saying? This quiz will give you the dope (info) on how to talk their dope (cool) talk. Yo!

4. **whatevs** interj.—A: don’t worry, be happy. B: no comment. C: I see. D: who cares?
ANSWERS

1. **down** — [A] In agreement with; willing; as, I’m down for a road trip to Florida at spring break.

2. **hootie** — [C] Old car that’s in bad shape; as, It may be a hootie, but it’s better than nothing at all.

3. **tight** — [A] Fantastic; cool; interesting; as, Have you heard the new CD from Dido? It is totally tight!

4. **whatevs** — [B] No comment; short for whatever. Adolescent equivalent of “what will be, will be.” Also, whatev.

5. **jet** — [C] Leave in a hurry; as, I’d better jet or the rents (parents) will be all bent out of shape.

6. **wack** — [B] Weird or strange; unfair or unacceptable; as, You’re breaking up with me? That’s wack. Also wacked.

7. **chill** — [D] To relax or calm down; often used with “out”; as, Let’s just chill at my house tonight; or, Getting that C is no big deal. You need to chill out.

8. **bling-bling** — [B] Something expensive; often jewelry, especially diamonds; also can be an adjective meaning “flashy”; as, His girlfriend is all about the bling-bling.

9. **my bad** — [B] My mistake or fault; It’s my bad that we haven’t finished shopping yet.

10. **crib** — [B] A house, apartment or any kind of residence; as, Come on over to my crib and we’ll watch the game. In Victorian times, it was slang for one’s lodgings.

11. **player** — [A] A person who dates many people at the same time; as, Tom’s such a player. He has a different girl every weekend. Also spelled playa.

12. **yo** — [B] Hey or hello; an attention-getter; as, Yo, Jeremy, you coming? Can be doubled as a greeting; as, Yo, yo, Mike, what’s up? Can be substituted for a name; as, Let’s get some dinner, yo.

13. **dis** — [D] To insult, dishonor or disrespect; as, My brother said he’d be there, but he dissed us and never showed up.

14. **peace out** — [B] See you later; goodbye; as, Gotta go to dinner. Peace out for now. Perhaps a combination of Peace, man and Over and out.

15. **homey** — [B] A close friend; as, I’m going skiing with my homeys next month. Also spelled homie. Probably derived from term homeboy, a person from one’s hometown or neighborhood.

16. **phat** — [A] Well put-together; excellent; great; as, That song has a really phat bass line.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-12 Good  13-14 Excellent  15-16 Exceptional
RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE DICTIONARY

Has your vocabulary grown old and tired? Our changing world and shifting interests have added hundreds of new words and meanings to the English language in just the last two decades. Try some of these newbies!

ANSWERS

1. **bork** —[C] To attack someone, especially in the media. From Judge Robert Bork, whose nomination to the Supreme Court was blocked by negative information.


3. **cocooning** —[A] Spending leisure time at home, especially watching TV or using a VCR.

4. **tree hugger** —[B] Environmentalist; campaigner for the preservation of trees and forests, who literally hugs a tree to prevent its being cut down.

5. **codependent** —[A] Regarding a relationship based on addiction or unhealthy dependence; as, Psychiatrists look for codependent behavior in families with problems.

6. **karaoke** —[C] The act of singing along to music videos from which the vocals have been eliminated. From the Japanese *kara* (empty) and *oke* (orchestra).

7. **nutraceutical** —[A] A food or other substance that has been supplemented with ingredients believed to have health benefits. From the combination of *nutrition* and *pharmaceutical*.

8. **digerati** —[D] Those with knowledge about computers; as, The publisher specialized in books for the digerati. From the combination of *digital* and *literati*.

9. **fashionista** —[A] Someone who is savvy about fashion trends, is stylish or works in the industry. From *fashion* and the Italian *-ista*.

10. **wannabe** —[B] One who aspires, often vainly, to emulate or attain the success and prominence of another person. Derivative of I *wanna be*.

11. **ecotourism** —[C] Traveling to natural, unspoiled areas; as, Ecotourism has raised awareness of the fragility of rain forests.

12. **prioritize** —[A] To organize according to importance; as, One key to time management is learning to prioritize.

13. **pathography** —[C] Biography focusing on the negative elements of a subject, popularized by U.S. writer Joyce Carol Oates; also, the study of the effects of illness on a historical person’s life.

14. **agita** —[B] Anxiety or agitation; heartburn or indigestion; as, Too much stress causes agita. From Italian *agitare*.

15. **channel** —[D] To get across or convey the spirit and style of someone else; as, Her outfit suggested she was channeling Liza Minnelli.

**VOCABULARY RATINGS**

10-11 Good 12-13 Excellent 14-15 Exceptional
It seems that each political election, we are bombarded with negative ads and emotionally charged debates. Some call it “extreme campaigning.” But there was a time we expected better from our leaders. Our first President, George Washington, was the epitome of humility and sincerity. These words, spoken from the heart, come from his inaugural address.


ANSWERS

1. **vicissitudes** — [B] Ups and downs; changing conditions; as, Washington recognized the vicissitudes affecting the evolution of America. Latin vicissim (in turn) and cessim (giving away).

2. **aver** — [A] To declare or assert in a positive manner. Derived from Latin verus (true).

3. **supplication** — [C] An earnest, humble request; as, He made divine supplication for the success of the new nation. Latin supplex (submissive).

4. **immutable** — [C] Unchangeable; unalterable. Latin mutare (to change).

5. **predilection** — [D] Preference; as, Though he had a predilection for life as a private citizen, Washington answered his country’s call. Latin praediligere (to prefer).


7. **discernment** — [B] Good judgment and understanding; as, Washington had faith in Congress’s “discernment and pursuit of the public good.” Latin discernere (to separate).

8. **presage** — [C] To make a prediction; as, Washington anticipated “the future blessings which the past seem to presage.” Latin praesagus (having a foreboding).


10. **magnanimous** — [B] High-minded or noble; as, Washington felt that a magnanimous government would help America prosper. Latin magnus (large) and animus (soul).


12. **propitious** — [D] Favorable; as, The “propitious smiles of Heaven,” Washington believed, would be awarded only to a righteous nation.

13. **despondence** — [B] Depression of spirits from loss of courage; as, Our first President confessed to feeling despondence about his qualifications for office. Latin despondere (to give up).

14. **palliate** — [A] To relieve without curing; to alleviate; as, Washington hoped that any error in his judgment would be palliated by his motives. Latin palliatus (cloaked).

15. **pecuniary** — [A] Referring to money; as, While President, Washington stated he would “renounce every pecuniary compensation.”

VOCABULARY RATINGS

10-11 Good 12-13 Excellent 14-15 Exceptional
In his 72 years of life, author Isaac Asimov wrote more than 500 books, making him one of the most prolific authors of our time. What is amazing is that the quality of his work often matched the quantity. His explorations of robots, outer space, and the future potential of mankind continue to spark debate more than a decade after his passing. These words are taken from some of Asimov’s stories.

ANSWERS

1. **verbatim** — [D] Word for word; being in or following the exact words. Don't blame me—I'm repeating Dad's instructions to you *verbatim*.

2. **chirrup** — [C] Chirp. The morning quiet was disturbed only by the odd *chirrup* of a nearby robin.

3. **pince-nez** — [B] Eyeglasses clipped to the nose by a spring. The librarian peered at me over the lenses of his *pince-nez* and said, “That book is two years overdue.”

4. **prosaic** — [A] Dull, unimaginative; also, everyday, ordinary. Unfortunately, I'll spend the weekend doing a bunch of *prosaic* chores.

5. **deduce** — [C] Infer from a general principle. When my son said he hated cereal, I *deduced* that I needed to fix a different breakfast.

6. **forestall** — [B] Exclude or hinder; also, to obstruct; beset. I planned to *forestall* his leaving by asking him to shine my shoes.

7. **sluice** — [A] Artificial passage for water fitted with a valve or gate for regulating flow. Once the *sluice* opened, we pretty much got soaked.

8. **tremulous** — [D] Characterized by or affected with trembling or tremors, such as might be caused by nervousness or shakiness. His *tremulous* smile told me he wasn’t as relaxed as he hoped to appear.

9. **buttress** — [B] Strengthen; support. I think you should try to *buttress* your opinion with a few small facts.

10. **crystalline** — [D] Sparkling; strikingly clear; resembling crystal. Gazing at the *crystalline* lake, I decided it was too beautiful to swim in.

11. **subside** — [A] Sink or fall to the bottom; settle; also, to become quiet; diminish. Once my initial anger *subsided*, I began laughing at all those pancakes stuck to the wall.

12. **aberration** — [B] Unsoundness; that which departs significantly from the standard. Sleeping with your pillow beneath your feet would be considered something of an *aberration*.

13. **proficiency** — [D] Quality or state of being advanced; highly skilled. You show real *proficiency* in the art of making the perfect pizza.

14. **cower** — [B] Shrink away or crouch, especially from something that menaces or dismays. Horror movies always make me *cower* in my seat.

15. **thrum** — [A] To sound with a monotonous hum. Suddenly, a loud vibration began to *thrum* the wall I was leaning against.

16. **erratic** — [C] Characterized by lack of consistency, regularity or order. His *erratic* behavior convinced me he wouldn’t be reliable in the job.

**VOCABULARY RATINGS**

10-12 Good  13-14 Excellent  15-16 Exceptional
Wouldn’t life be grand if orchestras followed us around and we could break into song whenever we wanted? A little far-fetched, but it’s exactly what makes Broadway musicals such a wonderful and enduring American art form. We turned to the lyrics from some popular musicals for the words used here. And now, it’s on with the show.

## ANSWERS

1. **heinous** — [C] Abominable; reprehensible. *If she says your behavior is heinous/Kick her right in the Coriolanus*—“Brush Up Your Shakespeare”

2. **accrue** — [D] To accumulate or be added periodically; to come as a result of some state or action. *The hobbies you pursue together/Savings you accrue together*—“Little Things”

3. **iniquity** — [A] Wickedness; gross injustice. *In our little den of iniquity/Our arrangement is good*—“Den Of Iniquity”


5. **impetuous** — [B] Marked by impulsive passion or force. *Yet there’s that upturned chin/And the grin of impetuous youth*—“I Believe In You”

6. **finagle** — [A] To obtain by trickery, indirect means. *Throw ‘em a fake and a finagle/They’ll never know you’re just a bagel*—“Razzle Dazzle”

7. **beguile** — [C] To charm or divert; pass time pleasantly. *I'm wild again/Beguiled again/A simpering, whimpering child again*—“Bewitched”

8. **flaunt** — [D] To display ostentatiously. *Ven you got it, flaunt it—When You Got It, Flaunt It*

9. **palazzo** — [B] Large building, especially in Italy. *Could still she be drinkin’ in her stinkin’ pink palazzo?—“Where Is The Life That Late I Led?”*

10. **inquisition** — [A] Harsh or severe questioning. *I’d prefer a new edition of the Spanish Inquisition—I’m An Ordinary Man*

11. **gaudy** — [D] Flashy; marked by extravagance. *Naughty, bawdy, gaudy, sporty/Forty-Second Street*—“42nd Street”

12. **fop** — [A] Vain man; silly person. *It’s fop/Finest in the shop/And we have some shepherd’s pie/With actual shepherd on top*—“A Little Priest”

13. **ennui** — [C] Boredom; feeling of weariness. *When I’m out on a quiet spree/Fighting vainly the old ennui*—“I Get A Kick Out Of You”


15. **equipoise** — [C] State of equilibrium. *And just a minute boys/I got the feed box noise/It says the great-grandfather was Equipoise*—“Fugue For Tinhorns”

16. **virago** — [B] Loud, overbearing woman; woman of strength. *Where is Fedora, the wild virago?—“Where Is The Life That Late I Led?”*

## VOCABULARY RATINGS

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KELSEY GRAMMER WORDS

Ever since Dr. Frasier Crane’s first pompous appearance on “Cheers,” we’ve laughed at his pretensions and foibles. Kelsey Grammer dazzled us as the charm-challenged psychiatrist on “Frasier,” so we salute his comedic talent and his way with words. Deliver a few bons mots of your own with vocabulary from the show.


*Although “Frasier” knows this word, Webster’s doesn’t. So it won’t affect your score.*
WORD POWER | BIG TALKERS

ANSWERS

1. **empathize** — [A] Experience vicariously or identify with the feelings of another person. Lilith is chatting with the nervous man next to her on a plane, who's turned white as a sheet. “I can empathize,” she says. “After a late night, I cover my under-eye circles with Liquid Paper.”

2. **patronizing** — [B] Condescending; of behavior that implies superiority. A 13-year-old calls the show to tell Frasier his advice was patronizing. Frasier says: “Kids. You can’t live with ‘em, and you can’t shove ‘em back in the womb.”

3. **enigma** — [B] Puzzling thing or person. As Eddie the dog stares balefully at him, Frasier asks, “Is my head a large piece of kibble? Am I a canine enigma?”

4. **ploy** — [D] Maneuver or strategy to gain advantage. The new boss at the station has announced a wage freeze. Angry employees gather at Frasier’s, where he tells them: “It’s simply a ploy of an overly ambitious station manager. ... Time we said no to this Princess of Darkness.”

5. **charlatan** — [B] Fraud; quack; someone who pretends to have knowledge or skill. Frasier thinks Martin underestimates his skill at “reading” people. “What troubles are to pigs, so are the charlatans and pettifoggers to my mental acuity.”

6. **hellacious** — [C] Agonizing; miserable. Roz is telling Frasier about her weekend: “I had the most hellacious date of my life. I pick him up from work, stop for gas—and I had to pump it myself while he read the sports section.”

7. **grovel** — [B] Behave obsequiously in seeking favor or forgiveness. “Remember why you left Maris in the first place?” Frasier asks his brother. “You were tired of groveling.” “Yes, but I’m rested now,” says Niles.

8. **archetype** — [A] Original model or type, after which similar things are patterned. Frasier, speaking of basketball: “It’s the archetypal male-bonding ritual.” Niles says, “Couldn’t we just go into the woods, kill something and have done with it?”

9. **lout** — [D] Boorish, insensitive person. Martin is trying to convince Frasier that it’s all right to lie in some circumstances—in this case, about Niles’s affection for Daphne. “You make me sound like some sort of lout,” says Frasier.


11. **prattle** — [D] Talk idly or meaninglessly; babble. Frasier remarks to Niles, “You’re a psychiatrist; you know what it’s like to listen to people prattling on about their mundane lives.” Niles comes back with: “And on that subject, I heard your show today.”

12. **legerdemain** — [D] Artful trickery; sleight of hand. “It’s better that our political legerdemain remain sub rosa, hmm?” Frasier asks his father. Then he adds, “How would a normal person say that, Dad?”

VOCABULARY RATINGS

4-6 Good  7-8 Excellent  9-11 Exceptional
WILLIAM SAFIRE WORDS

Be there at the birth of a word! Impress friends with how hip you are to contemporary idiom. Each Sunday, William Safire’s witty take on language appears in The New York Times Magazine. Here are usages he loved and hated in recent years.

1. tipping point n.—a state of
8. rope-a-dope adj.—relating to a strategy that A: plays off someone’s lack of knowledge. B: is based on a frustrating defense. C: cowboys use on cattle drives. D: is taught to car salespeople.
ANSWERS

1. **tipping point** —[D] A state of no return by a movement or trend. *Critical mass* was once a popular phrase and means much the same. As, The drive to take dot-coms public had its *tipping point* in the late '90s.

2. **dead-ender** —[C] A foolish unwillingness to accept defeat. The military's substitute for *die-hard*, which implied nobly fighting on for a lost cause. In sports, *dead-ender* suggests a loser.

3. **diva** —[A, B, C, D] Originally, a diva meant a leading woman singer, especially in opera. Today, it refers to any glamorous and successful female personality or performer. It's also come to mean an arbiter of taste, as in *cultural diva* and *domestic diva*.

4. **über-** —[A] A prefix indicating superlative status; the ultimate. It seems to have more oomph than the overused super- and inadequate hyper-; as, Much of Europe now has an übercurrency, the euro.

5. **jonesing** —[B] A hankering or craving; as, Sometimes only Ben & Jerry's will do when you've got a jonesing for ice cream.

6. **trash talk** —[C] Insulting language intended to upset or intimidate a rival, particularly in sports; as, Ball players and rappers are masters of trash talk. Also seen as talkin' trash.

7. **embed** —[D] As military jargon, it means to place a journalist with a unit of troops, where he or she lives with and follows the soldiers into combat. As a noun, emphasize em-.

8. **rope-a-dope** —[B] Relating to a defensive strategy that frustrates and ultimately weakens an offense, making it vulnerable. First used by boxer Muhammad Ali, the term has now crossed over into diplomatic lingo (diplolingo).

9. **tank** —[B] Fail spectacularly; collapse; as, Bogus accounting led Enron to tank. In athletics, tank connotes failing deliberately, or throwing a game.

10. **props** —[C] Proper respect; honor. Usually used with give. Began life on the West Coast in the music industry, where shorthand speech is a way of life and giving props to your collaborators is vital.

11. **shooz** —[B] Concerns or issues; can also be represented as shoes; as, A management consultant needs to wrap up an open shooz list.

12. **vougism** —[A] A fashionable, hip word or phrase that is picked up by politicians, intellectuals and talking heads and repeated endlessly. This term first appeared in Safire's “On Language” column. He admits, though, to little success in getting it adopted.

VOCABULARY RATINGS
7-8 Good  9-10 Excellent  11-12 Exceptional
Bob Dylan is no longer the skinny folksinger we remember from the 1960s, but to many of us he still represents youthful rebellion. Amazingly, he continues to write and perform great music well into his 60s. His skill with words also infuses his autobiographical work from 2004, entitled *Chor- ni-cles, Volume One*. That’s where we got the words used in this quiz.

ANSWERS

1. cryptic —[D] Having or seeming to have a hidden meaning; mysterious. His cryptic remarks made me think he knew something he wasn’t revealing.

2. zeal —[A] Fervor. Your zeal for exposing the truth is thrilling.

3. renounce —[B] To give up, refuse or resign, usually by formal declaration; repudiate. If you must enforce those ancient rules, I must renounce my allegiance to your cause.

4. bucolic —[A] Relating to or typical of rural life; pastoral. Things got tense in the city, so he fled for more bucolic surroundings up north.

5. firebrand —[C] One who creates unrest or strife; agitator. The crowd was eerily quiet, as though waiting for the firebrand to set it off.

6. citadel —[D] Fortress that commands a city; stronghold. For close to three years, she treated the tiny house as their citadel.

7. gaunt —[C] Excessively thin and angular; barren, desolate. He played up his gaunt appearance by smearing white makeup on his face.

8. transcend —[A] To rise above or go beyond the limits of; overcome. Whenever I hear the melody of that song, I’m able to transcend whatever petty task I’m doing.

9. affirmation —[C] Act of validation, confirmation. His return to regular performing served as affirmation for the fans who knew it was inevitable.

10. vernacular —[C] Language or dialect native to a group, region or country. When writing great folk songs, use a distinctly American vernacular.

11. deity —[B] A god or goddess; a person or thing considered supremely powerful. He scoffs at those who treat him as a deity.

12. debauched —[A] To be corrupted by intemperance or sensuality; debased. Before you criticize the behavior of others, you should take a moment to consider your own debauched past.

13. retract —[D] To draw back or in; take back, withdraw. The problem with a lie is that once you’ve told it, it’s not so easy to retract.

14. antebellum —[C] Existing before a war, specifically the U.S. Civil War. Driving through Natchez, Mississippi, on Highway 61, you see plenty of antebellum homes.

15. portico —[A] A covered structure, usually supported by columns or piers, often at a building’s entrance. We kicked off our boots and spent the afternoon sipping lemonade inside the mansion’s portico.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

7-9 Good  10-12 Excellent  13-15 Exceptional