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THE USAGE PANEL

The Usage Panel is a group of nearly 200 prominent scholars, creative writers, journalists, diplomats, and others in occupations requiring mastery of language. Annual surveys have gauged the acceptability of particular usages and grammatical constructions.

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wax¹ (wăks)

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n.

1.

a. Any of various natural, oily or greasy heat-sensitive substances, consisting of hydrocarbons or esters of fatty acids that are insoluble in water but soluble in nonpolar organic solvents.

b. Beeswax.

c. Earwax.

2.

a. A solid plastic or pliable liquid substance, such as ozocerite or paraffin, originating from petroleum and found in rock layers and used in paper coating, as insulation, in crayons, and often in medicinal preparations.

b. A preparation containing wax used for polishing floors and other surfaces.

3. A resinous mixture used by shoemakers to rub on thread.

4. A cosmetic procedure in which facial or body hair is removed by peeling away a layer of wax that has been allowed to harden.

adj.

Made of wax: *a wax candle*.

tr.v. waxed, wax·ing, wax·es

1. To coat, treat, or polish with wax.

2.

a. To remove (facial or body hair) by covering the skin with a layer of wax that is peeled off after hardening, uprooting the encased hairs.

b. To remove hair from (a portion of the body) by this method.

Idiom:

on wax

Informal In the medium of phonograph recordings.

[Middle English, from Old English *weax*.]

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wax² (wăks)

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intr.v. waxed, wax·ing, wax·es

1. To increase gradually in size, number, strength, or intensity: “*His love affair with Mrs. Bernstein waxed and waned and waxed again*” (C. Hugh Holman).

2. To show a progressively larger illuminated area, as the moon does in passing from new to full.

3.

a. To grow or become as specified: “*His very body had waxed old in lowly service of the Lord*” (James Joyce).

b. To speak or write as specified: “*[He] warmed to his most favorite of subjects, waxed eloquent, gained in his face a glow of passion*” (Paul J. Willis).

Phrasal Verb:

wax on

To speak or write at length about something: “*Mason waxed on and on about the old days*” (Jennifer Crusie).

[Middle English *waxen*, from Old English *weaxan*; see **aug-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

Usage Note: The use of *wax* to mean “To grow or become as specified” is rarely encountered nowadays, but the slightly more specific subsense “To speak or write as specified” is somewhat more common. In both these senses *wax* acts not as an ordinary intransitive verb but as a linking verb like *be* or *become*; it is ordinarily followed by a predicate adjective such as *lyrical* or *poetic* that tells what quality the subject or the subject's speech or writing is taking on. To follow *wax* with an adverb as if it were an ordinary intransitive verb meaning “To speak or write” is a nonstandard usage; in our 2017 survey, 68 percent of the Usage Panel rejected the sentence *At the meeting, the CFO waxed lyrically about the importance of trimming costs*, and 79 percent rejected *At the meeting, the CFO waxed on and on about the importance of trimming costs*.

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wax³  (wäks)

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n.

Chiefly British

A fit of anger: “All at once you would suddenly find yourself reverting to childish attitudes, flaring up in a wax with some fellow” (Frank O'Connor).

[Perhaps from [WAX](#)² (as in archaic *to wax angry*, to grow angry).]

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

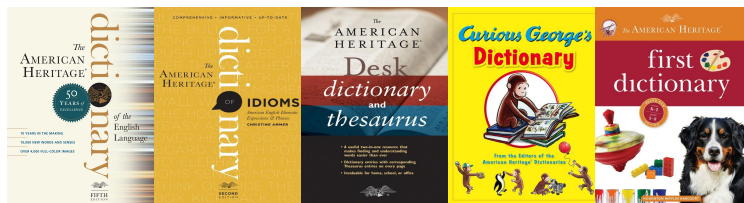
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

[Semitic Roots](#)

The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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