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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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or¹  (ôr; ər when unstressed)

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conj.

1.
 - a. Used to indicate an alternative, usually only before the last term of a series: *hot or cold; this, that, or the other.*
 - b. Used to indicate the second of two alternatives, the first being preceded by *either* or *whether*: *Your answer is either ingenious or wrong. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.*
 - c. *Archaic* Used to indicate the first of two alternatives, with the force of *either* or *whether*.
2. Used to indicate a synonymous or equivalent expression: *acrophobia, or fear of great heights.*
3. Used to indicate uncertainty or indefiniteness: *two or three.*

[Middle English, from *other*, or (from Old English, from *oththe*) and from *outher* (from Old English *āhwæther*, *āther*; see [EITHER](#)).]

Usage Note: When all the elements in a series connected by *or* are singular, the verb they govern is singular: *Tom or Jack is coming. Beer, ale, or wine is included in the charge.* When all the elements are plural, the verb is plural. When the elements do not agree in number, some grammarians have suggested that the verb should agree in number with the nearest element: *Tom or his sisters are coming. The girls or their brother is coming. Cold symptoms or headache is the usual first sign.* Other grammarians, however, have argued that such constructions are inherently illogical and that the only solution is to revise the sentence to avoid the problem of agreement: *Either Tom is coming or his sisters are. The usual first sign may be either cold symptoms or a headache.* See Usage Notes at [and/or](#), [either](#), [neither](#), [nor](#)¹.

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-or¹

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suff.

One that performs a specified action: *accelerator*.

[Middle English *-or*, *-our*, from Old French *-eor*, *-eur* and Anglo-Norman *-our*, *-ur*, all from Latin *-or*, *-ōr*.]

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OR¹  (ôr)

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n.

A logical operator that returns a true value if one or both operands are true.

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or²  (ôr) *Archaic*

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conj.

Before. Followed by *ever* or *ere*: "*I doubt he will be dead or ere I come*" (Shakespeare).

prep.

Before.

[Middle English, variant of *er*, from Old English *ǣr*, soon, early, and from Old Norse *ār*; see **ayer-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

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-or²

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suff.

State; quality; activity: *valor*.

[Middle English *-our*, from Old French *-eur*, from Latin *-or*, *-ōr-*.]

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OR²

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abbr.

1. operating room
2. operations research
3. Oregon

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or³  (ôr)

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n.

Heraldry

Gold, represented in heraldic engraving by a white field sprinkled with small dots.

[Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *aurum*.]

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

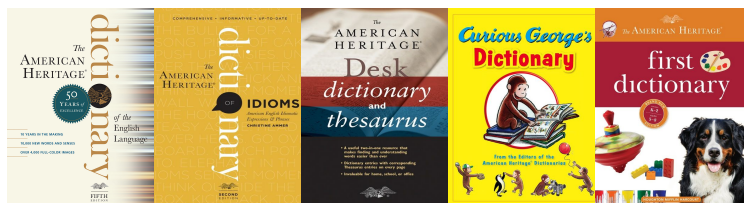
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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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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