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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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re·fute  (rĭ-fy t)

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tr.v. **re·fut·ed, re·fut·ing, re·futes**

1. To prove to be false or erroneous; overthrow by argument or proof: *refute testimony.*
2. To deny the accuracy or truth of: *refuted the results of the poll.*
3. *Usage Problem* To repudiate.

[Latin *refūtāre*; see **bhau-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

re·fut'a·bil i·ty (rĭ-fy 'tə-bĭl ĭ-tē, rĕf yə-tə-) *n.*

re·fut a·ble (rĭ-fy tə-bəl, rĕf yə-tə-) *adj.*

re·fut a·bly *adv.*

re·fut er *n.*

Usage Note: Traditionally, the verb *refute* has two meanings. The first is “to prove to be false or erroneous,” as in *Charges of institutional bias against women were refuted by an analysis of the employment data.* In this example, it is clear that an argument was mustered to demonstrate the falsity of the charges. This usage is well established as standard. The second meaning is “to deny the accuracy of,” and in this use there is no mention or implication of mustering evidence or detailed reasoning. Rather, the refutation exists as a simple statement or claim. This second use has been criticized as incorrect or inappropriate since the early 1900s, despite being common. A majority of the Usage Panel accepts the use as a synonym of *deny*, but not by a wide margin. In our 2017 survey, just 58 percent accepted the example *In the press conference, the senator categorically refuted the charges of malfeasance but declined to go into details.* This suggests that many readers are uncomfortable with this usage and would prefer to see *deny* in these contexts. Beyond these two meanings, *refute* is sometimes used to mean “to deny the validity of, repudiate,” as in *Observers are expecting the appeals court to refute the Microsoft breakup.* The Panel has scant affection for this usage. Only 10 percent accepted the example just quoted in the 2017 survey.

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

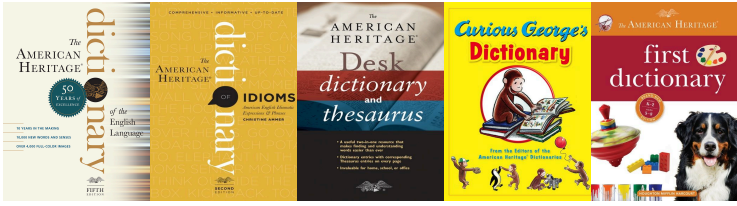
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[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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