



The  
AMERICAN  
HERITAGE®

dictionary

of the  
English  
Language


## HOW TO USE THE DICTIONARY

To look up an entry in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, use the search window above. For best results, after typing in the word, click on the “Search” button instead of using the “enter” key.

Some compound words (like *bus rapid transit*, *dog whistle*, or *identity theft*) don’t appear on the drop-down list when you type them in the search bar. For best results with compound words, place a quotation mark before the compound word in the search window.

[guide to the dictionary](#)



## 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.

[The Panelists](#)



## AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY APP

The new American Heritage Dictionary app is now available for [iOS](#) and [Android](#).



## THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY BLOG

The articles in our [blog](#) examine new words, revised definitions, interesting images from the fifth edition, discussions of usage, and more.

**THE 100 WORDS®**

See word lists from the best-selling 100 Words Series!

[Find out more!](#)



## INTERESTED IN DICTIONARIES?

Check out the Dictionary Society of North America at <http://www.dictionariesociety.com>

**bit** <sup>1</sup> (bĭt)

Share: [Tweet](#)

*n.*

1. A small portion, degree, or amount: *a bit of lint; a bit of luck.*
2. A brief amount of time; a moment: *Wait a bit.*
3.
  - a. A short scene or episode in a theatrical performance.
  - b. A bit part.
4. An entertainment routine given regularly by a performer; an act.
5. *Informal*
  - a. A particular kind of action, situation, or behavior: *got tired of the macho bit.*
  - b. A matter being considered: *What's this bit about inflation?*
6. *Informal* An amount equal to one eighth of a dollar: *two bits.*
7. *Chiefly British* A small coin: *a threepenny bit.*

**Idioms:**

**a bit**

To a small degree; somewhat: *a bit warm.*

**bit by bit**

Little by little; gradually.

**do (one's) bit**

To do one's part or contribute one's share.

---

[Middle English *bite*, morsel, from Old English *bita*; see **bheid-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.](#)]

---

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition copyright ©2022 by HarperCollins Publishers. All rights reserved.

**bit** <sup>2</sup> (bĭt)

Share: [Tweet](#)

*n.*

1. The sharp part of a tool, such as the cutting edge of a knife or axe.
2. A pointed and threaded tool for drilling and boring that is secured in a brace, bitstock, or drill press.
3. The part of a key that enters the lock and engages the bolt and tumblers.
4. The tip of the mouthpiece on a pipe or a cigarette or cigar holder.
5. The metal mouthpiece of a bridle, serving to control, curb, and direct an animal.
6. Something that controls, guides, or curbs.

*tr.v.* **bit-ted, bit-ting, bits**

1. To place a bit in the mouth of (a horse, for example).
2. To check or control with or as if with a bit.
3. To make or grind a bit on (a key).

**Idiom:**

**have/take the bit in one's teeth**

To be uncontrollable; cast off restraint.

---

[Middle English *bite*, from Old English, act of biting; see **bheid-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.](#)]

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition copyright ©2022 by HarperCollins Publishers. All rights reserved.

bit <sup>3</sup>  (bĭt)

Share: [Tweet](#)

*n.*

*Computers*

A binary digit, having either the value 0 or 1, used to store or represent data.

[From [B\(INARY DIG\)IT](#).]

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition copyright ©2022 by HarperCollins Publishers. All rights reserved.

bit <sup>4</sup>  (bĭt)

Share: [Tweet](#)

*v.*

Past tense and a past participle of [bite](#).

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition copyright ©2022 by HarperCollins Publishers. All rights reserved.

## Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

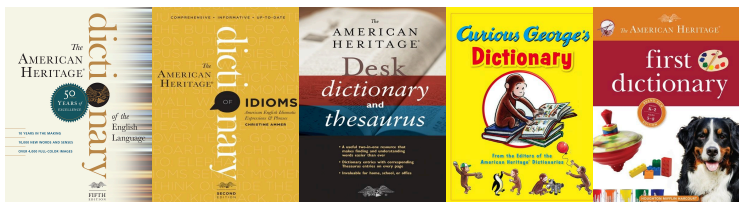
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[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](#).

## American Heritage Dictionary Products



[The American Heritage Dictionary, 5th Edition](#)  
[The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms](#)  
[The American Heritage Roget's Thesaurus](#)

[Curious George's Dictionary](#)  
[The American Heritage Children's Dictionary](#)

- **CONTACT US**
- [Customer Service](#)
- [Make Me An Author](#)
- [Ebooks Help with Glose Reader](#)
- **ABOUT US**
- [Company Profile](#)
- [Leadership Team](#)
- [Corporate Social Responsibility](#)
- [HarperCollins Careers](#)
- [HarperCollins Imprints](#)
- [HarperGreen](#)
- [Social Media Directory](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- **FOR READERS**
- [Browse Reading Guides](#)
- **FOR AUTHORS**
- [Submit a Manuscript](#)
- [Report Piracy](#)
- [Agent Portal](#)
- **MEDIA**
- [Publicity Contacts](#)
- [Press Room](#)
- **SERVICES**
- [HarperCollins Speakers Bureau](#)
- [Library Services](#)
- [Academic Services](#)
- [Desk & Exam Copies](#)
- [Review Copies](#)
- [OpenBook API](#)
- [Marketing Partnerships](#)
- **COVID-19 RESOURCES & PERMISSIONS**
- [Permissions for Adult Online Readings](#)
- [Permissions for Kids Online Readings](#)
- **SALES & RIGHTS**
- [Booksellers & Retailer Ordering](#)
- [HarperCollins Catalogs](#)
- [Permissions](#)
- [Subsidiary Rights](#)
- [Media Rights and Content Development](#)
- **GLOSE APP**
- [iPhone](#)
- [Android](#)
- 
- 
- 
- **GLOBAL DIVISIONS**
- [HarperCollins US](#)
- [HarperCollins Canada](#)
- [HarperCollins Christian](#)
- [HarperCollins Australia](#)
- [HarperCollins India](#)
- [HarperCollins UK](#)
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 



*News Corp*

[Terms of Use](#) • [Terms of Sale](#) • [Your Ad Choices](#) • [Privacy Policy](#) • [California Privacy Policy](#)  
[Do Not Sell My Personal Information](#)

Copyright 2022 HarperCollins Publishers All rights reserved.

\*This website is best viewed in Chrome, Firefox, Microsoft Edge, or Safari. Some characters in pronunciations and etymologies cannot be displayed properly in Internet Explorer.