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AMERICAN  
HERITAGE®

dictionary

of the  
English  
Language

  


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**flam·ma·ble** 🔊 (flăġm ə-bəl)

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*adj.*

Easily ignited and capable of burning rapidly.

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[From Latin *flammāre*, to set fire to, from *flamma*, flame; see **bhel**-<sup>1</sup> in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

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**flam'·ma·bil i·ty** *n.*

**flam ma·ble** *n.*

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**Usage Note:** *Inflammable* means "combustible," and has the same meaning as the word *flammable*. How is this possible? The prefix *in-* here is not the Latin negative prefix *in-* (which is related to the English *un-* and appears in words such as *indecent* and *inglorious*) but is derived from the Latin preposition *in*, "in." This prefix also appears in the word *inflamm*. However, some people mistakenly think that *inflammable* means "not flammable." Therefore, for clarity's sake, it is safest to avoid *inflammable* altogether and use *flammable* instead.

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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](#)

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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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