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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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for·bear¹  (fôr·bâr)

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v. **for·bore** (-bôr), **for·borne** (-bôrn), **for·bear·ing**, **for·bears**

v.intr.

1. To keep oneself from doing something; hold back; refrain: *forbear from making a comment.*
2. To be tolerant or patient in the face of provocation.

v.tr.

1. To refrain from; resist: *forbore criticizing them.*
2. To restrain oneself so as not (to do something): "*He saw that she was preoccupied, and forbore to question her*" (Thomas Hardy).

[Middle English *forberen*, from Old English *forberan*, to endure; see **bher**·¹ [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

for·bear er n.

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for·bear²  (fôr bâr')

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n.

Variant of [forebear](#).

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fore·bear also **for·bear**  (fôr bâr')

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n.

A person from whom one is descended; an ancestor. See Synonyms at [ancestor](#).

[Late Middle English (Scottish) *forbear* : Middle English *fore-*, *fore-* + *beer*, one who is (from *ben*, to be; see [BE](#) + *-er*, *-er*; see [-ER](#)¹).]

Usage Note: Etymologically, a *forebear* is a "a fore-be-er," a person who has existed in earlier times. But because the *-bear* part of this word is pronounced to rhyme with the verb *bear*, people apparently conceive of the word's meaning as "a person who has given birth in earlier times," or "a person who has borne burdens in earlier times," as if it was a compound of the prefix *fore-* and the verb *bear*. The existence of the verb *forbear* has probably reinforced this notion, even though that verb means "to restrain oneself from doing something" and has lost its original meaning of "to endure." At any rate, the noun *forebearer* is sometimes found in place of *forebear* even in edited prose in sentences like *His forebearers had crossed the Appalachians shortly after the American Revolution*. The Usage Panel rejects this usage strongly but not overwhelmingly. In fact, 36 percent accepted this sentence in our 2008 survey, suggesting that *forebearer* may soon be a word whose time has come.

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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