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BE

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abbr.

1. Bachelor of Education
2. Bachelor of Engineering
3. barium enema
4. bill of exchange
5. Board of Education

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Be

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The symbol for [beryllium](#).

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Bé

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abbr.

Baumé scale

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be-

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pref.

1. Completely; thoroughly; excessively. Used as an intensive: *bemuse*.
2. On; around; over: *besmear*.
3. About; to: *bespeak*.
4. Used to form transitive verbs from nouns, adjectives, and intransitive verbs, as:
 - a. To make; cause to become: *bedim*.
 - b. To affect, cover, or provide: *bespectacled*.

[Middle English *bi-*, *be-*, from Old English *be-*, *bi-*; see **ambhi** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

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be  (bē)

v. First and third person singular past indicative **was**(wǔz, wǒz; wəz when unstressed) second person singular and plural and first and third person plural past indicative **were**(wûr) past subjunctive **were**past participle **been**(bĭn) present participle **be-ing**(bē ĭng) first person singular present indicative **am**(ām) second person singular and plural and first and third person plural present indicative **are**(ār) third person singular present indicative **is**(ĭz) present subjunctive **be**

v. intr.

1. To exist in actuality; have life or reality: *I think, therefore I am.*

2.

a. To occupy a specified position: *The food is on the table.*

b. To remain in a certain state or situation undisturbed, untouched, or unmolested: *Let the children be.*

3. To take place; occur: *The test was yesterday.*

4. To go or come: *Have you ever been to Italy? Have you been home recently?*

5. Used as a copula in such senses as:

a. To equal in identity: *“To be a Christian was to be a Roman” (James Bryce).*

b. To have a specified significance: *A is excellent, C is passing. Let n be the unknown quantity.*

c. To belong to a specified class or group: *The human being is a primate.*

d. To have or show a specified quality or characteristic: *She is witty. All humans are mortal.*

e. To seem to consist or be made of: *The yard is all snow. He is all bluff and no bite.*

6. To belong; befall: *Peace be unto you. Woe is me.*

v. aux.

1. Used with the past participle of a transitive verb to form the passive voice: *The mayoral election is held annually.*

2. Used with the present participle of a verb to express a continuing action: *We are working to improve housing conditions.*

3. Used with the infinitive of a verb to express intention, obligation, or future action: *She was to call before she left. You are to make the necessary changes.*

4. Used with the past participle of certain intransitive verbs to form a perfect tense: *Those days are gone. Let me know when you are finished.*

[Middle English *ben*, from Old English *bēon*; see **bheu-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots. See [AM](#)¹, [IS](#), etc. for links to other Indo-European roots.]

Usage Note: Traditional grammar requires the subjective form of the pronoun in the predicate of the verb *be*: *It is I* (not *me*), *That must be they* (not *them*), and so forth. The rule is based on the vague notion that the complement of *be* is being equated with the subject of the sentence and so it should be treated like the subject and have subjective case. This reasoning is faulty because the grammatical case of a noun or pronoun is really determined by its position in the sentence, not by what it refers to, and in anything but the most formal style the complement of *be* takes objective case: people say *It's me*, not *It's I*. Indeed, in informal contexts the subjective pronoun can sound pretentious and even ridiculous, especially when the pronoun also functions as the object of a verb or preposition in the relative clause, as in *It isn't them/they that we have in mind*, where the third-person pronoun serves as both the complement of *is* and the object of *have*. In our 2016 survey, 71 percent of the Usage Panel accepted *It isn't them that we have in mind*, while only 53 percent accepted *It isn't they that we have in mind*. Following the traditional rule in such cases is more of a stylistic preference than a grammatical imperative. Fortunately, writers who wish to avoid sounding stilted but prefer not to violate the standard rule can usually revise their sentences easily enough: *They are not the ones we have in mind*, *We have someone else in mind*, and so on. See Usage Notes at [I](#)¹, [we](#).

Our Living Language In place of the inflected forms of *be*, such as *is* and *are*, used in Standard English, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and some varieties of Southern American English may use zero copula, as in *He working*, or an invariant *be*, as in *He be working*, instead of the Standard English *He is working*. As an identifying feature of the vernacular of many African Americans, invariant *be* has been frequently seized on by writers and commentators trying to imitate or parody black speech. However, most imitators use it simply as a substitute for *is*, as in *John be sitting in that chair now*, without realizing that within AAVE, invariant *be* is used primarily for habitual or extended actions set in the present. Among African Americans the form is most commonly used by working-class speakers and young persons. Since the 1980s, younger speakers have tended to restrict the use of the form to progressive verb forms (as in *He be walking*), whereas their parents also use it with adjectives (as in *He be nice*) and expressions referring to a location (as in *He be at home*). Younger speakers also use invariant *be* more exclusively to indicate habitual action, whereas older speakers more commonly omit *be* forms (as in *He walking*) or use present

tense verb forms (such as *He walks*), sometimes with adverbs like *often* or *usually*, to indicate habituality. · The source of invariant habitual *be* in AAVE is still disputed. Some linguists suggest that it represents influence from finite *be* in the 17th- to 19th-century English of British settlers, especially those from the southwest of England. Other linguists feel that contemporaneous Irish or Scotch-Irish immigrants may have played a larger role, since their dialects mark habitual verb forms with *be* and *do be*, as in “*They be shooting and fishing out at the Forestry Lakes*” (archival recordings of the Royal Irish Academy) and “*Up half the night he does be*” (James Joyce). But some have argued that the development of invariant *be* in Irish English came after its development in AAVE. Other linguists believe that habitual *be* in AAVE may have evolved from the habitual *does be* construction brought to America by Caribbean Creole slaves and migrants from the 17th century on; until very recently, the construction was still in use among Gullah speakers from coastal South Carolina and Georgia, where Barbadian and other Caribbean slaves had been well-represented in the founding populations. Still other linguists suggest that invariant *be* is an innovation within AAVE arising in the second half of the 20th century, essentially a response to the wide range of meanings that the English progressive tense can express. See Notes at [like](#)², [zero copula](#).

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

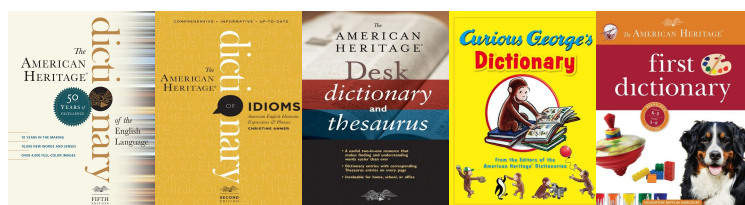
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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