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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.

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