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break  (brāk)

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v. **broke** (brōk), **bro·ken** (brō kən), **break·ing**, **breaks**

v.tr.

1. To cause to separate into pieces suddenly or violently; smash.

2.

a. To divide into pieces, as by bending or cutting: *break crackers for a baby.*

b. To separate into components or parts: *broke the work into discrete tasks.*

3. To snap off or detach: *broke a twig from the tree.*

4.

a. To cause to undergo a fracture of (a bone, for example): *The impact of the fall broke his leg.*

b. To experience a fracture in (a bone, for example): *I broke my wrist when skateboarding.*

5. To crack without separating into pieces: *broke the mirror.*

6.

a. To destroy the completeness of (a group of related items): *broke the set of books by giving some away.*

b. To exchange for smaller monetary units: *break a dollar.*

7. To vary or disrupt the uniformity or continuity of: *a plain that was broken by low hills; caught the ball without breaking stride.*

8. *Electricity* To render (a circuit) inoperative by disruption; open.

9. To open (a shotgun or similar firearm) at the breech, as for loading or cleaning.

10.

a. To force or make a way through; puncture or penetrate: *The blade barely broke the skin.*

b. To part or pierce the surface of: *a dolphin breaking water.*

11. To produce (a sweat) copiously on the skin, as from exercise.

12. To force one's way out of; escape from: *break jail.*

13. To make or bring about by cutting or forcing: *break a trail through the woods.*

14.

a. To find an opening or flaw in: *They couldn't break my alibi.*

b. To find the solution or key to; uncover the basic elements and arrangement of: *break a code; break a spy ring.*

15. To make known, as news: *break a story.*

16. To surpass or outdo: *broke the league's home-run record.*

17. To overcome or put an end to, especially by force or strong opposition: *break a deadlock in negotiations; break a strike.*

18. *Sports* To win a game on (an opponent's service), as in tennis.

19. To lessen the force or effect of: *break a fall.*

20. To render useless or inoperative: *We accidentally broke the radio.*

21. To weaken or destroy, as in spirit or health; overwhelm with adversity: *"For a hero loves the world till it breaks him" (William Butler Yeats).*

22. To cause the ruin or failure of (an enterprise, for example): *Indiscretion broke both marriage and career.*

23. To reduce in rank; demote.

24. To cause to be without money or to go into bankruptcy.

25. To fail to fulfill; cancel: *break an engagement.*

26. To fail to conform to; violate: *break the speed limit.*

27. *Law* To cause (a will) to be invalidated because of inconsistency with state inheritance laws or as a result of other legal insufficiency.

28.

- a. To give up (a habit).
- b. To cause to give up a habit: *They managed to break themselves of smoking.*
- 29. To train to obey; tame: *The horse was difficult to break.*
- v.intr.
- 1. To become separated into pieces or fragments.
- 2. To become cracked or split.
- 3. To become fractured: *His arm broke from the fall.*
- 4. To become unusable or inoperative: *The television broke.*
- 5. To give way; collapse: *The scaffolding broke during the storm.*
- 6. To burst: *The blister broke.*
- 7.
- a. To intrude: *They broke in upon our conversation.*
- b. To filter in or penetrate: *Sunlight broke into the room.*
- 8. To scatter or disperse; part: *The clouds broke after the storm.*
- 9. *Games* To make the opening shot that scatters the grouped balls in billiards or pool.
- 10. *Sports* To separate from a clinch in boxing.
- 11. *Sports* To win a game on the opponent's service, as in tennis: *broke twice in the first set.*
- 12. To move away or escape suddenly: *broke from his grip and ran off.*
- 13. To come forth or begin from a state of latency; come into being or emerge: *A storm was breaking over Miami.*
- Crocuses broke from the soil.*
- 14. To emerge above the surface of water.
- 15. To become known or noticed: *The big story broke on Friday.*
- 16. To change direction or move suddenly: *The quarterback broke to the left to avoid a tackler.*
- 17. *Baseball* To curve near or over the plate: *The pitch broke away from the batter.*
- 18. To change suddenly from one tone quality or musical register to another: *His voice broke into a falsetto.*
- 19. *Linguistics* To undergo breaking.
- 20. To change to a gait different from the one set. Used of a horse.
- 21. To interrupt or cease an activity: *We'll break for coffee at ten.*
- 22. To discontinue an association, an agreement, or a relationship: *The partners broke over a financial matter. One hates to break with an old friend.*
- 23. To diminish or discontinue abruptly: *The fever is breaking.*
- 24. To diminish in or lose physical or spiritual strength; weaken or succumb: *Their good cheer broke after repeated setbacks.*
- 25. To decrease sharply in value or quantity: *Stock prices broke when the firm suddenly announced layoffs.*
- 26. To come to an end: *The cold spell broke yesterday.*
- 27. To collapse or crash into surf or spray: *waves that were breaking along the shore.*
- 28. *Informal* To take place or happen; proceed: *Things have been breaking well for them.*
- 29. To engage in breaking; break dance.
- n.
- 1. The act or an occurrence of breaking.
- 2. The result of breaking, as a crack, separation, or opening: *a break in the clouds.*
- 3. The beginning or emergence of something: *the break of day.*
- 4. A sudden movement; a dash: *The dog made a break toward the open field.*
- 5. An escape: *a prison break.*
- 6. An interruption or a disruption in continuity or regularity: *television programming without commercial breaks.*
- 7. A pause or interval, as from work: *a coffee break.*
- 8. A sudden or marked change: *a break in the weather.*
- 9. A violation: *a security break.*
- 10. An often sudden piece of luck, especially good luck: *finally got the big break in life.*
- 11. *Informal*
- a. An allowance or indulgence; accommodating treatment: *The boss gave me a break because I'd been sick.*
- b. A favorable price or reduction: *a tax break for charitable contributions.*
- 12. A severing of ties: *made a break with the past; a break between the two families.*
- 13. *Informal* A faux pas.
- 14. A sudden decline in prices.
- 15. A caesura.
- 16. *Printing*
- a. The space between two paragraphs.

- b. A series of three dots (...) used to indicate an omission in a text.
- c. The place where a word is or should be divided at the end of a line.
- 17. *Electricity* Interruption of a flow of current.
- 18. *Geology* A marked change in topography such as a fault or deep valley.
- 19. *Nautical* The point of discontinuity between two levels on the deck of a ship.
- 20. *Music*
 - a. The point at which one register or tonal quality changes to another.
 - b. The change itself.
 - c. An improvised instrumental solo played in jazz and other popular music while the other musicians stop or play softly.
- 21. A change in a horse's gait to one different from that set by the rider.
- 22. *Sports* The swerving of a ball from a straight path of flight, as in baseball or cricket.
- 23. *Sports* The beginning of a race.
- 24. *Sports*
 - a. A fast break.
 - b. The separation after a clinch in boxing.
- 25. *Games* The opening shot that scatters the grouped balls in billiards or pool.
- 26. *Games* A run or unbroken series of successful shots, as in billiards or croquet.
- 27. *Sports & Games* Failure to score a strike or a spare in a given bowling frame.
- 28. *Sports* A service break.
- 29. Variant of [brake](#)⁶.
- 30. Break dancing.

Phrasal Verbs:

break away

- 1. To separate or detach oneself, as from a group.
- 2. To move rapidly away from or ahead of a group: *The cyclist broke away from the pack.*
- 3. To discontinue customary practice.

break down

- 1. To cause to collapse; destroy: *break down a partition; broke down our resolve.*
- 2. To become or cause to become distressed or upset. To have a physical or mental collapse.
- 3. To give up resistance; give way: *prejudices that break down slowly.*
- 4. To fail to function; cease to be useful, effective, or operable: *The elevator broke down.*
- 5. To render or become weak or ineffective: *Opposition to the king's rule gradually broke down his authority.*
- 6. To divide into or consider in parts; analyze. To be divisible; admit of analysis: *The population breaks down into three main groups.*
- 7. To decompose or cause to decompose chemically.
- 8. *Electricity* To undergo a breakdown.

break in

- 1. To train or adapt for a purpose.
- 2. To loosen or soften with use: *break in new shoes.*
- 3. To enter premises forcibly or illegally: *a prowler who was trying to break in.*
- 4. To interrupt a conversation or discussion. To intrude.
- 5. To begin an activity or undertaking: *The Senator broke in during the war years.*

break into

- 1. To interrupt: *"No one would have dared to break into his abstraction" (Alan Paton).*
- 2. To begin suddenly: *The horse broke into a wild gallop. The child broke into a flood of tears.*
- 3. To enter (a field of activity): *broke into broadcast journalism at an early age.*

break off

- 1. To separate or become separated, as by twisting or tearing.
- 2. To stop suddenly, as in speaking.
- 3. To discontinue (a relationship). To cease to be friendly.

break out

- 1. To become affected with a skin eruption, such as pimples.
- 2. To develop suddenly and forcefully: *Fighting broke out in the prison cells.*
- 3. To ready for action or use: *Break out the rifles!* To bring forth for consumption: *Let's break out the champagne.*
- 4. To emerge or escape.
- 5. To be separable or classifiable into categories, as data.
- 6. To isolate (information) from a large body of data.

break through

To make a sudden, quick advance, as through an obstruction.

break up

1. To separate or be separated into pieces: *She broke up a chocolate bar. The river ice finally broke up.* To interrupt the uniformity or continuity of: *An impromptu visit broke up the long afternoon.*

2. To scatter; disperse: *The crowd broke up after the game.*

3. To cease to function or cause to stop functioning as an organized unit or group: *His jazz band broke up. The new CEO broke up the corporation.*

4. To bring or come to an end: *Guards broke up the fight. They argued, and their friendship broke up.*

5. *Informal* To burst or cause to burst into laughter.

Idioms:**break a leg**

Used to wish someone, such as an actor, success in a performance.

break bread

To eat together.

break camp

To pack up equipment and leave a campsite.

break cover

To emerge from a protected location or hiding place: *The platoon broke cover and headed down the road.*

break even

To gain an amount equal to that invested, as in a commercial venture.

break ground

1. To begin a new construction project.

2. To advance beyond previous achievements.

break new ground

To advance beyond previous achievements: *broke new ground in the field of computers.*

break (one's) neck

To make the utmost possible effort.

break rank/ranks

1. To fall into disorder, as a formation of soldiers.

2. To fail to conform to a prevailing or expected pattern or order: *"Architectural experts have criticized the plaza in the past because it breaks rank with the distinctive façades of neighboring Fifth Avenue blocks, whose buildings are flush with the sidewalk" (Sharon Churcher).*

break (someone's) heart

To disappoint or dispirit someone severely.

break the bank

To require more money than is available.

break the buck

To fall below the value of one dollar. Used of the net asset value of a mutual fund, especially a money market fund.

break the ice

1. To make a start.

2. To relax a tense or unduly formal atmosphere or social situation.

break wind

To expel intestinal gas.

[Middle English *breken*, from Old English *brecan*; see **bhreg-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

Synonyms: [break](#), [crack](#), [fracture](#), [burst](#), [splinter](#), [shatter](#), [smash](#)

These verbs mean to become separated into parts or pieces, either by the sudden application of force or by the pressure of internal stress. *Break* is the most general: *That delicate ornament will break easily. The bag held so many heavy things that it broke.*

To *crack* is to break without dividing into parts: *The building's foundation cracked during the earthquake.*

Crack can also mean to break apart: *"Burning branches crack from trees and fall in showers of sparks at my feet" (Suzanne Collins).*

Fracture applies to a break or crack in a rigid body: *Heat and pressure caused the bedrock to fracture.*

Burst implies a sudden coming apart, especially from internal pressure: *"Even when their bellies seemed about to burst, their mouths craved more and they drank on" (Ian McEwan).*

Splinter implies splitting into long, thin, sharp pieces: *The boat's hull splintered when it hit the reef.*

To *shatter* is to break into many scattered pieces: *The icicle shattered when it landed on the front steps.*

Smash stresses force of blow or impact and suggests complete destruction: *I dropped the vase, and it smashed into*

pieces.

All of these verbs can also be used transitively (that is, they can take a direct object) as in *break the glass* or *fracture your arm*. See Also Synonyms at [opportunity](#).

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

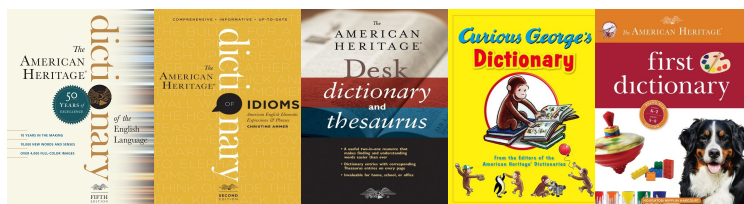
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