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per·cent also **per cent**  (pər-sěnt)

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adv.

Out of each hundred; per hundred.

n.

1. *pl. percent* also *per cent* One part in a hundred: *The report states that 42 percent of the alumni contributed to the endowment.* Also called *per centum*.

2. *pl. percents* A percentage or portion: *She has invested a large percent of her salary.*

3. *percents* Chiefly British Public securities yielding interest at a specified percentage.

adj.

Paying or demanding interest at a specified percentage: *a 2.25 percent checking account.*

[Short for Early Modern English *per centum* (formed on the model of Italian *per cento*, for (every) hundred) : Latin *per*, through, by; see [PER](#) + *centum*, hundred; see **dek** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

Usage Note: Statistically speaking, a quantity can be increased by any percentage but cannot be decreased by more than 100 percent. Once pollution has been reduced by 100 percent, for example, it ceases to exist. In defiance of this logic, however, advertisers sometimes refer to *a 150 percent decrease in lost luggage* or *a new dental rinse that reduces plaque on teeth by over 300 percent*. Presumably what is implied by the latter is that the new rinse is three times as effective as some other rinse, but such constructions are still subject to criticism as illogical. · *Percent* can take a singular or plural verb, depending on how the quantity being described is viewed. Very often what determines the form of the verb is the noun nearest to it. Thus one might say *Eighty percent of the legislators are going to vote against the bill* or *Eighty percent of the legislature is set to vote the bill down*. In the second sentence the group of legislators is considered as a body, not as individuals. When *percent* is used without a following prepositional phrase, either a singular or plural verb is acceptable.

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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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