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dictionary

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Language



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Some compound words (like *bus rapid transit*, *dog whistle*, or *identity theft*) don’t appear on the drop-down list when you type them in the search bar. For best results with compound words, place a quotation mark before the compound word in the search window.

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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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per·fect  (pûr fĭkt)

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adj.

1. Lacking nothing essential to the whole; complete of its nature or kind.
2. Being without defect or blemish: *a perfect specimen*.
3. Thoroughly skilled or talented in a certain field or area; proficient.
4. Completely suited for a particular purpose or situation: *She was the perfect actress for the part*.
5.
 - a. Completely corresponding to a description, standard, or type: *a perfect circle; a perfect gentleman*.
 - b. Accurately reproducing an original: *a perfect copy of the painting*.
6. Complete; thorough; utter: *a perfect fool*.
7. Pure; undiluted; unmixed: *perfect red*.
8. Excellent and delightful in all respects: *a perfect day*.
9. *Botany* Having both stamens and pistils in the same flower; monoclinous.
10. Capable of sexual reproduction. Used of fungi.
11. *Grammar* Of, relating to, or constituting a verb form expressing action completed prior to a fixed point of reference in time.
12. *Music* Designating the three basic intervals of the octave, fourth, and fifth.

n.

1. *Grammar* The aspect of a verb that expresses action completed prior to a fixed point of reference in time.
2. A verb or verb form having this aspect.

tr.v. (pər-fĕkt) **per·fect·ed, per·fect·ing, per·fects**

To bring to perfection or completion: *perfected the technique to isolate the virus*.

[Middle English *perfit*, from Old French *parfit*, from Latin *perfectus*, past participle of *perficere*, to finish : *per-*, *per-* + *facere*, to do; see **dhē-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

per·fect *er n.*

per fect·ness *n.*

Synonyms: [perfect](#), [consummate](#), [faultless](#), [flawless](#), [impeccable](#)

These adjectives mean being wholly without flaw: a perfect diamond; a consummate performer; faultless logic; a flawless instrumental technique; speaks impeccable French.

Usage Note: The adjective *perfect* is often considered an absolute term like *chief* and *prime*; some maintain that it therefore cannot be modified by *more*, *quite*, *relatively*, and other qualifiers of degree. But the qualification of *perfect* has many reputable precedents (most notably in the preamble to the US Constitution in the phrase “*in order to form a more perfect Union*”). When *perfect* means “ideal for a purpose,” as in *There could be no more perfect spot for the picnic*, modification by degree is considered acceptable; in fact 74 percent of the Usage Panel approved this example in our 2004 survey. See Usage Notes at [absolute](#), [equal](#), [unique](#).

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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