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THE USAGE PANEL

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fe·male  (fē māl')

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adj.

1.

a. Of or denoting the sex that produces ova or bears young.

b. Characteristic of or appropriate to this sex in humans and other animals: *female hormones*; *female fashions*.

c. Consisting of members of this sex. See Usage Note at [lady](#).

2. Of or denoting the gamete that is larger and less motile than the other corresponding gamete. Used of anisogamous organisms.

3. *Botany*

a. Designating an organ, such as a pistil or ovary, that functions in producing seeds after fertilization.

b. Bearing pistils but not stamens; pistillate: *female flowers*.

4. Designed to receive or fit around a complementary male part, as a slot or receptacle: *the female end of an extension cord*.

n.

1. A female organism.

2. A woman or girl.

[Middle English, alteration (influenced by *male*, male) of *femelle*, from Old French, from Latin *fēmella*, diminutive of *fēmina*, woman; see **dhē(i)-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

fe male'ness *n.*

Usage Note: Perhaps because the use of *female* to modify a noun for a professional, as in *female doctor*, can seem derogatory if it seems to imply that professionals are male by default, some writers use *woman* or *women* as modifiers when identifying the sex of the referent is necessary. Despite this tendency, in our 2016 survey, overwhelming majorities of the Usage Panel (97 percent) found the use of both *female* and *male* to be acceptable in the sentences *This book is written by a _____ author* and *This anthology features _____ authors*. In contrast, the Panelists overwhelmingly rejected *man author* (92 percent), *man authors* (96 percent), and *men authors* (81 percent). *Woman authors* was a bit less unpopular (it was rejected by 74 percent of the panel), but it was rejected largely because of the clash between the singular modifier and plural noun, not because *woman* was being used as a modifier. The Panel was more favorable toward *woman author*, which was accepted by 43 percent of Panelists, and *women authors*, which was accepted by 64 percent, the only phrase among the batch surveyed that received a majority acceptance.

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

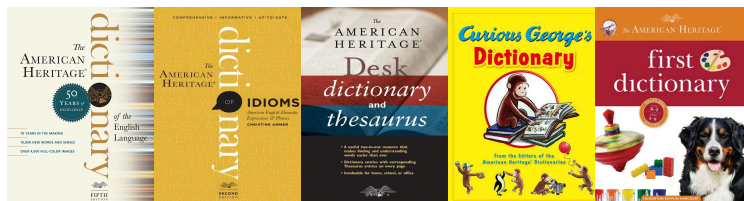
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[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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