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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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doubt  (dout)

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v. **doubt·ed**, **doubt·ing**, **doubts**

v.tr.

1. To be undecided or skeptical about: *began to doubt some accepted doctrines.*
2. To tend to disbelieve; distrust: *doubts politicians when they make sweeping statements.*
3. To regard as unlikely: *I doubt that we'll arrive on time.*
4. *Archaic* To suspect; fear.

v.intr.

To be undecided or skeptical.

n.

1.
 - a. The state of being uncertain about the truth or reliability of something. See Synonyms at [uncertainty](#).
 - b. often **doubts** A feeling of uncertainty or distrust: *had doubts about his ability.*
2. A point about which one is uncertain or skeptical: *reassured me by answering my doubts.*
3. The condition of being unsettled or unresolved: *an outcome still in doubt.*

Idioms:

beyond/without doubt

Without question; certainly; definitely.

no doubt

1. Certainly.
2. Probably.

[Middle English *douten*, from Old French *douter*, from Latin *dubitāre*, to waver; see **dwo-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

doubt *er n.*

Usage Note: The choice of what conjunction to use following *doubt* and *doubtful* is a perennial usage problem. When *doubt* and *doubtful* indicate strong uncertainty, the Usage Panel prefers *whether* and *that* over *if*. In our 2008 survey, 51 percent indicated that they would use *that*, while 43 percent preferred *whether* in the following sentence: *At one time it was doubtful [that/whether/if] the company could recover from its financial difficulties, but the government loan seems to have helped.* Only 6 percent said they would favor *if* in this sentence, probably because *if* has a more informal tone. When the expectation for the outcome is negative, *that* tends to be used. Some 86 percent of the Panel prefer *that* in the sentence *I doubt [that/whether/if] it will rain tomorrow* (where the expectation is that it probably won't rain), with *whether* getting the preference of only 6 percent and *if* getting 7 percent. Note that, in certain kinds of sentences, the choice of conjunction can carry subtle differences in implication. *That* is the best choice when the truth of the clause following *doubt* is assumed, as in negative sentences and questions. Thus *I never doubted for a minute that I would be rescued* implies "I was certain that I would be rescued." By the same token, *Do you doubt that you will be paid?* may be understood as a rhetorical question meaning "Surely you believe that you will be paid," whereas *Do you doubt whether you will be paid?* expresses a genuine request for information (and might be followed by *Because if you do, you should make the client post a bond*). Note that it is also acceptable to omit *that* in these sentences: *I doubt she will accept the nomination.* In other cases, however, this distinction between *whether* and *that* is not always observed. · When *doubt* is negated to indicate belief or certainty, the clause following *doubt* is sometimes introduced with *but that* or simply *but*, as in *I do not doubt but that they will come.* This construction has

been used by many fine writers, but some critics object to its use in formal writing. Dropping the *but* easily solves this problem. See Usage Notes at [but](#), [if](#).

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

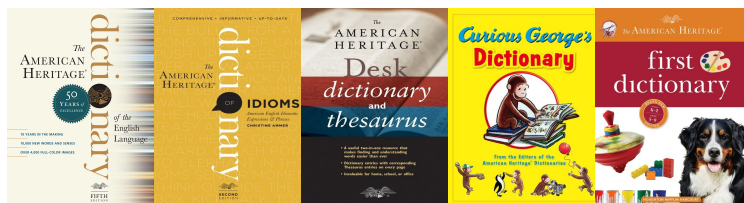
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

[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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