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dictionary

of the
English
Language



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es·sence  (ĕs əns)

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n.

1.

a. The intrinsic or indispensable quality or qualities that serve to characterize or identify something: *The essence of democracy is the freedom to choose.*

b. Philosophy The inherent, unchanging nature of a thing or class of things, especially as contrasted with its existence.

2. The most important part or aspect of something: *The essence of her argument is that the policy is wrongheaded.*

3.

a. An extract that has the fundamental properties of a substance in concentrated form.

b. Such an extract in a solution of alcohol.

c. A perfume or scent.

4. One that has or shows an abundance of a quality as if highly concentrated: *a neighbor who is the essence of hospitality.*

5. Something that exists, especially a spiritual or incorporeal entity.

Idioms:

in essence

By nature; essentially: *He is in essence a reclusive sort.*

of the essence

Of the greatest importance; crucial: *Time is of the essence.*

[Middle English *essencia* and French *essence*, both from Latin *essentia*, from *esse*, to be, from the presumed present participle **essēns*, **essent-* (on the model of *differentia*, difference, from *differēns*, *different-*, present participle of *differre*, to differ), created to translate Greek *ousiā* (from *ousa*, feminine present participle of *einai*, to be) ; see **es-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

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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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