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AMERICAN  
HERITAGE®

dictionary

of the  
English  
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.

[guide to the dictionary](#)



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**en·ter·prise**  (ĕn tər-prīz')

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*n.*

1. An undertaking, especially one of some scope, complication, and risk.
2. A business organization.
3. Industrious, systematic activity, especially when directed toward profit: *Private enterprise is basic to capitalism.*
4. Willingness to undertake new ventures; initiative: *"Through want of enterprise and faith men are where they are, buying and selling, and spending their lives like serfs" (Henry David Thoreau).*

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[Middle English, from Old French *entreprise*, from past participle of *entreprendre*, to undertake : *entre-*, between (from Latin *inter-*; see [INTER-](#)) + *prendre*, to take (from Latin *prehendere*, *prēndere*; see **ghend-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#)).]

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**en tər-pris'er** *n.*

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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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