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dictionary

of the  
English  
Language

  


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**re·fuse**<sup>1</sup>  (rĭ-fy z )

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v. **re·fused**, **re·fus·ing**, **re·fus·es**

v.tr.

1.

a. To indicate unwillingness to do, accept, give, or allow: *She was refused admittance. He refused treatment.*

b. To indicate unwillingness (to do something): *refused to leave.*

2. To decline to jump (an obstacle). Used of a horse.

v.intr.

To decline to do, accept, give, or allow something.

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[Middle English *refusen*, from Old French *refuser*, from Vulgar Latin *\*refūsāre*, probably blend of Latin *recūsāre*, to refuse; see [RECUSE](#), and Latin *refūtāre*, refute; see [REFUTE](#).]

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**re·fus** er n.

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**Synonyms:** **refuse**<sup>1</sup>, **decline**, **reject**, **spurn**, **rebuff**

These verbs mean to be unwilling to accept, consider, or receive someone or something. *Refuse* implies determination and often brusqueness: "*The commander ... refused to discuss questions of right*" (George Bancroft). "*I'll make him an offer he can't refuse*" (Mario Puzo).

To *decline* is to refuse politely: "*I declined election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters ... and now I must decline the Pulitzer Prize*" ([Sinclair Lewis](#)).

*Reject* suggests the discarding of someone or something as defective or useless; it implies categoric refusal: "*He again offered himself for enlistment and was again rejected*" (Arthur S.M. Hutchinson).

To *spurn* is to reject scornfully or contemptuously: "*The more she spurns my love, / The more it grows*" (Shakespeare).

*Rebuff* pertains to blunt or disdainful rejection: "*He had ... gone too far in his advances, and had been rebuffed*" (Robert Louis Stevenson).

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**ref·use**<sup>2</sup>  (rĕf y s)

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n.

Items or material discarded or rejected as useless or worthless; trash or rubbish.

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[Middle English, from Old French *refus*, rejection, refuse, from *refuser*, to refuse; see [REFUSE](#)<sup>1</sup>.]

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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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