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breathe  (brēth)

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v. **breathed**, **breath-ing**, **breathes**

v.*intr.*

1.

- a. To inhale and exhale air using the lungs: *Use a snorkel to breathe while swimming.*
- b. To inhale air or another gas: *Breathe in slowly.*
- c. To exhale air or another gas: *I breathed on the window and fogged it up.*
- d. To exchange gases as part of respiration or photosynthesis: *Fish breathe with their gills. Stomata allow leaves to breathe.*
- e. To use air in combustion: *leave space so the fire can breathe; replace the air filter so the engine can breathe.*
2. To be alive; live: *A nicer person has never breathed.*
3. To pause to rest or regain breath: *Give me a moment to breathe.*
4. To move or blow gently: *A soft wind breathes through the pines.*
5. To allow air to pass through: *a natural fabric that breathes.*
6. To be exhaled or emanated, as a fragrance.
7. To be manifested or suggested, as an idea or feeling: *A sense of hope breathes from these poems.*
8. To reach fullness of flavor and aroma through exposure to air. Used chiefly of wine.

v.*tr.*

1.

- a. To inhale and exhale (air or a gas such as oxygen) during respiration.
- b. To inhale (an aroma, for example): *breathe the lush scent of lilacs.*
- c. To exhale or blow out: *The dragon breathed fire on the village.*
- d. To take in or exchange (air or gases): *Plants breathe carbon dioxide.*
2. To impart or instill: *an artist who knows how to breathe life into a portrait.*
3. To utter, especially quietly: *Don't breathe a word of this.*
4. To make apparent or manifest; suggest: *Their manner breathed self-satisfaction.*
5. To allow (a person or animal) to rest or regain breath.
6. *Linguistics* To utter with a voiceless exhalation of air.
7. To draw in (air) for combustion.

Idioms:

breathe down (someone's) neck

1. To threaten by proximity, especially by pursuing closely.
2. To watch or monitor closely, often annoyingly: *The boss was breathing down my neck all morning.*

breathe easily/easy/freely

To be relaxed or relieved, especially after a period of tension.

breathe (one's) last

To die.

[Middle English *brethen*, from *breth*, breath; see [BREATH](#).]

Our Living Language The euphemistic expression *breathe one's last* illustrates the phenomenon of *taboo avoidance*. Concepts that few people like to talk about, such as death, are often expressed by circumlocutions or other substitutions for the word that directly expresses the concept (in this case, the verb *to die*). It is interesting to compare how two different styles of language, formal and slang, avoid saying "die." More formal or elevated speech is full of euphemistic expressions such as *breathe one's last*, *pass away*, *depart*, *expire*, *go to one's eternal reward*, *go the way*

of all flesh, and go to a better place. Many of these expressions try to cast death in a positive light, often with religious overtones. *Die* is absent in slang for the same taboo-avoidance reasons; in addition, slang usually involves coming up with novel expressions for old concepts. The result is a raft of irreverent expressions that are much more direct than the elevated ones—but not so direct as to actually say "die." These expressions often concentrate on a particular physical aspect of dying, lending them an unusually vivid quality: *croak*, *bite the dust*, *go belly up*, *kick the bucket*, *cash in one's chips*.

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