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Language



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i·den·ti·ty  (ī-dĕn tĭ-tē)

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n. pl. i·den·ti·ties

1.

a. The condition of being a certain person or thing: *What is the identity of the author of the manuscript?*

b. The set of characteristics by which a person or thing is definitively recognizable or known: *"The identity of the nation had ... been keenly contested in the period of nationalist opposition to Imperial rule" (Judith M. Brown).*

c. The awareness that an individual or group has of being a distinct, persisting entity: *"He felt more at home thousands of miles from Britain than he did in an English village four miles from his home ... Was he losing his identity?" (Robert Fallon).*

2.

a. The fact or condition of being the same as something else: *The identity of the two handwriting samples was established by an expert.*

b. The fact or condition of being associated or affiliated with something else: *the identity between mass and energy.*

3. Information, such as an identification number, used to establish or prove a person's individuality, as in providing access to a credit account.

4. *Mathematics*

a. An equation that is satisfied by any number that replaces the letter for which the equation is defined.

b. Identity element.

[French *identité*, from Old French *identite*, from Late Latin *identitās*, from Latin *idem*, the same (influenced by Late Latin *essentitās*, being, and *identidem*, repeatedly), from *id*, it; see *i-* [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:

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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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