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dictionary

of the
English
Language



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chief  (chĕf)

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- n.*
1. One who is highest in rank or authority; a leader.
 2.
 - a. A chief petty officer.
 - b. *Nautical* The chief engineer of a ship.
 3. *Slang* A supervisor; a boss.
 4. *Heraldry* The upper section of a shield.
- adj.*
1. Highest in rank, authority, or office: *the chief scientist in the lab.*
 2. Most important or influential: *the chief ingredients in the stew.* See Usage Note at [absolute](#).

[Middle English *chef*, from Old French, from Latin *caput*, head; see **kaput-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

chief *dom n.*

chief *ship' n.*

Synonyms: chief, foremost, leading¹, main, primary, prime, principal

These adjectives refer to what is first in rank, importance, or influence: *his chief concern; the foremost scholar in her field; the leading cause of heart disease; the main building on campus; the primary purpose of the legislation; a prime example of wasteful spending; the principal figures in the plot.*

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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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