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an·ces·tor  (ăn sēs'tər)

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- n.*
1. A person from whom one is descended, especially if more remote than a grandparent; a forebear.
 2. A forerunner or predecessor.
 3. *Law* The person from whom an estate has been inherited.
 4. *Biology* The actual or hypothetical organism or stock from which later kinds evolved.

[Middle English *auncestre*, from Old French, from Latin *antecessor*, predecessor, from *antecessus*, past participle of *antecēdere*, to precede : *ante-*, ante- + *cēdere*, to go; see **ked-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.](#)]

Synonyms: ancestor, forebear, forefather, progenitor

These nouns denote a person from whom one is descended: *a chart showing the genealogy of her ancestors; land once owned by his forebears; a cemetery where some of my forefathers are buried; descended from illustrious progenitors.*

Antonym: [descendant](#)

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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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