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dictionary

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English
Language



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ex·cel  (ĭk-sĕl)

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v. **ex·celled**, **ex·cel·ling**, **ex·cels**

v.tr.

To do or be better than; surpass.

v.intr.

To show superiority; surpass others: *excels at tennis*.

[Middle English *excellen*, from Latin *excellere*; see **kel**-² in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

Synonyms: [excel](#), [surpass](#), [exceed](#), [outstrip](#), [outdo](#)

These verbs mean to be greater or better than someone or something. To *excel* is to achieve a level higher than another or others: *She excelled the other speakers in wit and eloquence*. To *surpass* is to go beyond another in performance, quality, or degree: *"Nevertheless, I had a sense of overwhelming modernity, of being a pioneer, of having surpassed my mother's generation by leagues and light-years"* (Shirley Abbott).

Exceed can refer to being superior to another (*an invention that exceeds all others in ingenuity*), to being greater than something (*a salary exceeding 250 thousand dollars a year*), and to going beyond a proper limit (*exceed one's authority*). *Outstrip* and *outdo* imply leaving another or others behind, as in a contest or competition: *The student outstripped her classmates in academic honors. "So back she went to join the other village flirts, and she outdid them all, with her flaunting smile and the wondrous way her body moved"* (William Goldman).

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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](#)

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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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