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THE USAGE PANEL

The Usage Panel is a group of nearly 200 prominent scholars, creative writers, journalists, diplomats, and others in occupations requiring mastery of language. Annual surveys have gauged the acceptability of particular usages and grammatical constructions.

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cen·ter  (sĕn tər)

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n.

1. A point or place that is equally distant from the sides or outer boundaries of something; the middle: *the center of a stage.*

2.

a. A point equidistant from the vertices of a regular polygon.

b. A point equidistant from all points on the circumference of a circle or on the surface of a sphere.

3. A point around which something rotates or revolves: *The sun is the center of our solar system.*

4. A part of an object that is surrounded by the rest; a core: *chocolates with soft centers.*

5.

a. A place where a particular activity or service is concentrated: *a medical center.*

b. A point of origin, as of influence, ideas, or actions: *a center of power; a center of unrest.*

c. An area of dense population: *a metropolitan center.*

6. A person or thing that is the chief object of attention, interest, activity, or emotion.

7. A person, object, or group occupying a middle position.

8. often **Center** A political group or a set of policies representing a moderate view between those of the right and the left.

9. *Physiology* A group of neurons in the central nervous system that control a particular function: *the vasomotor center.*

10.

a. *Sports* A player who holds a middle position on the field, court, or forward line in some team sports, such as hockey and basketball.

b. *Football* An offensive lineman who snaps the ball to begin a play, usually positioned in the middle of the line.

c. *Baseball* Center field.

11.

a. A small conical hole made in a piece of work with a center punch so that a drill can be accurately positioned within it.

b. A bar with a conical point used to support work, as during turning on a lathe.

12. *Architecture*

a. A centering.

b. A point in space equidistant from all the points on an arch or on a portion of an arch.

v. **cen·tered, cen·ter·ing, cen·ters**

v.tr.

1. To place in or at the center: *centered the vase on the table.*

2. To direct toward a center or central point; concentrate or focus: *tried to center the discussion on the main issues.*

3. *Sports*

a. To pass (a ball or puck) toward the center of a playing area.

b. To play as a center on (a line), as in ice hockey.

4. *Football* To hike (the ball) to begin a down.

v.intr.

1. To be concentrated; cluster: *The epidemic centered in the urban areas.*

2. To have a central theme or concern; be focused: *Her novels center on the problems of adolescence.*

3. *Sports* To play as a center.

[Middle English *centre*, from Old French, from Latin *centrum*, from Greek *kentron*, center of a circle, from *kentein*, to prick; see **kent-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

Usage Note: As a verb *center* can represent various relations involving having, finding, or turning about a center. The choice of a preposition to accompany *center* depends on the meaning one wants to convey. For certain physical uses, the Usage Panel favors *in* more than *at*. In our 1996 ballot, 73 percent found *in* acceptable, but only 23 percent accepted *at* in the sentence *The company has been centered (in/at) Atlanta for the last five years.* · In figurative contexts, there is ample evidence for *center in, on, upon,* and *around*. In our 2006 survey, for example, 91 percent of the Panel accepted *center on* in the sentence *The discussion centered on the need for curriculum reform.* Some language critics have denounced *center around* as illogical—if something is in the center, after all, it cannot be "around" something else. Nonetheless, 71 percent of the Usage Panel accepted *center around* in the 1996 survey, suggesting that, logical or not, *center around* must be considered a standard idiom. But if the expression does not seem a comfortable fit, *revolve around* offers itself as a substitute that clearly evokes an orbiting body. See Usage Note at [equal](#).

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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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