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ha·rass  (hə-rās , hărs əs)

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tr.v. **ha·rassed**, **ha·rass·ing**, **ha·rass·es**

1. To subject (another) to hostile or prejudicial remarks or actions; pressure or intimidate.
2. To irritate or torment persistently: *His mind was harassed by doubts and misgivings.*
3. To make repeated attacks or raids on (an enemy, for example).

[French *harasser*, from Old French (*a la*) *harache*, (*a la*) *harace* (as in *courre a la harache*, to chase) : *hare*, call used to set dogs on (of Germanic origin; see **ko-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#)) + *-ache*, *-ace*, deprecativ n. suff.]

ha·rass *er n.*

ha·rass *ment n.*

Synonyms: harass, harry, hound, badger, pester, plague

These verbs mean to trouble persistently or incessantly. *Harass* and *harry* imply systematic persecution by besieging with repeated annoyances, threats, or demands: *The landlord harassed the tenants who were behind in their rent.*

"John Adams and John Quincy Adams, pillars of personal rectitude, were harried throughout their presidencies by accusations of corruption, fraud, and abuses of power" (Alan Brinkley and Davis Dyer).

Hound suggests unrelenting pursuit to gain a desired end: *Reporters hounded the celebrity for an interview.* To *badger* is to nag or entreat persistently: *The child badgered his parents for a new bicycle.* To *pester* is to inflict a succession of petty annoyances: *"How she would have pursued and pestered me with questions and surmises"* (Charlotte Brontë).

Plague refers to a problem likened to a noxious disease: *"As I have no estate, I am plagued with no tenants or stewards"* (Henry Fielding).

Usage Note: The pronunciation of harass with stress on the first syllable (rhyming roughly with *Paris*) is the older, traditional pronunciation. The pronunciation with stress on the second syllable (rhyming roughly with *surpass*) is a newer pronunciation that first occurred in American English. Its use has steadily increased since the mid-1900s. In our 1987 survey, 50 percent of the Usage Panel preferred the pronunciation with stress on the first syllable, and 50 percent preferred stress on the second syllable. Fourteen years later, in our 2001 survey, preference for stress on the first syllable dropped to 30 percent while preference for stress on the second syllable rose to 70 percent. The results from our 2013 survey suggest that this trend away from the traditional pronunciation has continued: only 10 percent preferred the stress on the first syllable, whereas 90 percent preferred the pronunciation with the stress on the second syllable. In fact, in 2013, 35 percent of the Panel considered the pronunciation with the stress on the first syllable to be unacceptable. The original pronunciation has almost completely given way in only a few decades, at least in the United States.

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