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**what**  (wŏt, wŭt, hwŏt, hwŭt; wət, hwət *when unstressed*)

Share:

*pron.*

1.
  - a. Which thing or which particular one of many: *What are you having for dinner? What did she say?*
  - b. Which kind, character, or designation: *What are these objects?*
  - c. One of how much value or significance: *What are possessions to a dying man?*
2.
  - a. That which; the thing that: *Listen to what I tell you.*
  - b. Whatever thing that: *come what may.*
3. *Informal* Something: *I'll tell you what.*
4. *Nonstandard* Which, who, or that: *It's the poor what gets the blame.*

*adj.*

1. Which one or ones of several or many: *What college are you attending? You should know what musical that song is from.*
2. Whatever: *They soon repaired what damage had been done.*
3. How great; how astonishing: *What a fool!*

*adv.*

How much; in what respect; how: *What does it matter?*

*conj.*

That: *I don't know but what I'll go.*

*interj.*

1. Used to express surprise, incredulity, or other strong and sudden excitement.
2. *Chiefly British* Used as a tag question, often to solicit agreement.

**Idioms:**

**or what**

*Informal* Used as an intensive at the end of a question: *Is he crazy, or what? Are you a genius, or what?*

**what for**

1. A scolding or strong reprimand: *The teacher gave the tardy student what for.*
2. For what reason; why: *Give the present back.—What for?*

**what have you**

What remains and need not be mentioned: *a room full of chairs, lamps, radios, and what have you.*

**what if**

1. What would occur if; suppose that: *What if we were rich?*
2. What does it matter if: *What if he gets angry?—I don't care.*

**what it takes**

The necessary expertise or qualities needed for success: *She has what it takes to be a doctor.*

**what's what** *Informal*

The fundamentals and details of a situation or process; the true state or condition.

**what's/what is/what is it with** *Informal*

1. What is the reason for: *What's with the gloomy look?*
2. What is causing the unusual behavior of: *What's with you today?*
3. What is interesting, unusual, or worth making an observation about: *What's with airline food these days?*

**what with**

Taking into consideration; because of: *It's strange we can't find a cab, what with so many hotels nearby.*

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[Middle English, from Old English *hwæt*; see **k<sup>w</sup>o-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

**Usage Note:** When *what* is the subject of a clause, it takes a singular verb if the word or phrase that completes the sentence (the complement) is singular, as in *I see what seems to be a dead tree*. It is plural if a plural noun or noun phrase completes the sentence, as in *He sometimes makes what seem to be gestures of reconciliation*. · Clauses with *what* as either subject or object may themselves be the subject of a sentence, and sometimes it is difficult to decide whether the verb of the main clause should be singular or plural. When the *what* in the *what*-clause is the object of the verb and the complement of the main clause is singular, the main verb is always singular: *What they wanted was a home of their own*; when the complement of the main sentence is plural, the verb is most often plural: *What American education needs are smaller classes*, though one also encounters sentences such as *What the candidate gave the audience was the same old empty promises*. When *what* is the subject of a *what*-clause that is the subject of a main clause, there is greater variation in usage. When the verb of the *what*-clause and the complement of the main clause are both plural or both singular, the number of the verb of the main clause generally agrees with them. When the verb in the *what*-clause is singular and the complement in the main clause is plural, one finds both singular and plural verbs being used. Sentences similar to both of the following are found in respected writers: *What drives me crazy is her frequent tantrums*; *What bothers him are the discrepancies in their accounts*. When the complement of the main clause consists of two or more nouns, the verb of the main clause is generally singular if the nouns are singular and plural if they are plural: *What pleases the voters is his honesty and his willingness to take on difficult issues*; *On entering the harbor what first meet the eye are luxurious yachts and colorful villas*. Occasionally the choice of a singular or plural verb may be used to convey a difference in meaning. In the sentence *What excite him most are money and power*, the implication is that money and power are separable goals; in *What excites him most is money and power*, the implication is that money and power are inextricably bound together. See Usage Note at [which](#).

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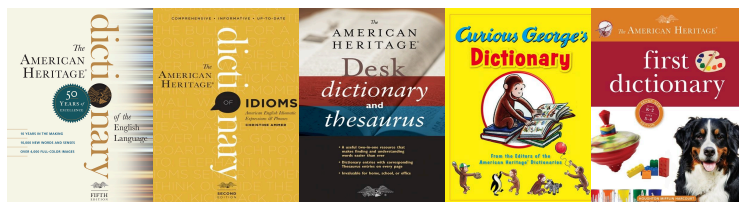
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