
The Word Within the Word • Notes #21

1. A Micropoem: Why does **equivocate** mean *to hedge*? Just as a hedge marks the point in between two fields, a person who wishes not to answer a question can take the mid-point, giving equal (equi) voice (voc) to both sides of the issue. Someone who praises both camps in a dispute is equivocating.
2. Fault-finding comments are called **captious** because they are designed to catch (capt: take) you. They are *full of catches* (ous, capt).
3. **Specious** does mean false, but not everything false is specious. Contrast **specious** with **veracious**. The veracious statement is full of truth, but the specious statement is full of (ous) looks (spec)! It is a good-looking false statement.
4. **Magnanimous** means great-minded not in the sense of great intelligence, but in the sense of greatness of spirit. Magnanimity is generosity, nobility of mind. Contrast **magnanimous** with **pusillanimous**—small minded.
5. **Commensurate** refers to the way two things can be in or out of scale with each other, and it implies that they should be in scale. If we take on a big job, we want a big reward, not a small one. We expect our reward to be commensurate with our task. The two things should measure (mens) together (co).
6. **Excoriate** is not made of **ex** and **cor/heart**. It is made of **ex** and the latin **corium**, meaning skin. To excoriate someone is, verbally, to skin them alive!
7. Before a motor company builds 200,000 new cars, they first (proto) make a model and test it. A **prototype** is a preliminary model built for testing and consideration. Once final decisions have been made, the company can proceed with full-scale production.
8. Why do we call a human beginner a neophyte (new plant)? We use the word **neophyte** in a metaphorical way. A beginner in the art world is like a baby plant which has just broken out of its seed and put forth two little leaves. A neophyte in the art world is a brand new “baby” artist.
9. **Ten Pronunciation Tips**
superfluous - soo PER flu ous
specious - SPEE shus
neophyte - neo FIGHT
xenophobia - ZEENO fobia
magnanimous - mag NAN i muss
malevolence - ma LEV o lence
equivocate - ee KWIV o kate
omniscient - om NISH unt
incredulous - in KRED yoo luss
10. **Spanish Cognates:** One of the most important observations to gain from the study of the etymology of English vocabulary is that English and Spanish share thousands of words that are cognates, related words, that have common origins. Often, the English and the Spanish word share not only a stem, but even more than one stem, and often in the same order. As examples, here are some English words from this lesson, and their Spanish cognates:

equivocate : equivocar
superfluous : superfluo
bilateral : bilateral
unilateral : unilateral
malevolence : malevolencia
neophyte : neofita

bellicose : belicoso
anthropomorphic : antropomórfico
malediction : maldición
incredulous : incrédulo
omniscient : omnisciente
prototype : prototipo

The Word Within the Word • Classic Words #21

In each case below, one of the choices was really the word used by the author in the sentence provided. All of the choices can be found in the example words on the first page of this lesson. Your challenge is to decide which word the author used. This is not a test; it is more like a game, because more than one word choice may work perfectly well. See if you can use your sensitivity and intuition to guess correctly which word the author used. You may need a dictionary.

1. From F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

That ashen, fantastic figure [glided] toward him through the _____ trees.

- a. captious
- b. superfluous
- c. **amorphous**
- d. unilateral

2. From Jane Austen's *Emma*

The consciousness of having done amiss had...made her _____ and irritable to a degree.

- a. **captious**
- b. malevolent
- c. omniscient
- d. specious

3. From William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

Ralph had been deceived before now by the _____ appearance of depth in a beach pool.

- a. amorphous
- b. magnanimous
- c. bellicose
- d. **specious**

4. From Alfred Lansing's *Endurance*

The only _____ item Shackleton permitted was Worsley's diary.

- a. incredulous
- b. bellicose
- c. **superfluous**
- d. bilateral

5. From Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*

I walked more _____ keeping an eye on every side.

- a. **circumspectly**
- b. malevolently
- c. omnisciently
- d. magnanimously

The Word Within the Word • List #21

equivocate	<i>(to hedge)</i>	The equivocating politician praised both groups.
superfluous	<i>(unnecessary)</i>	A superfluous comment is a waste of time.
bilateral	<i>(two-sided)</i>	The two nations formed a bilateral agreement.
unilateral	<i>(one-sided)</i>	The U.S. made a unilateral withdrawal.
circumspect	<i>(cautious)</i>	A circumspect reply is safer.
commensurate	<i>(of like measure)</i>	A big job needs a commensurate reward.
malevolence	<i>(evil intent)</i>	The creature cast a malevolent glare.
neophyte	<i>(beginner)</i>	She is a neophyte in the art world.
misanthropist	<i>(people-hater)</i>	The grouchy misanthropist wouldn't contribute.
bellicose	<i>(warlike)</i>	The bellicose tribe attacked without warning.
anthropomorphic	<i>(man-shaped)</i>	They believe in an anthropomorphic god.
captious	<i>(fault-finding)</i>	The captious remarks were not sincere.
neologism	<i>(new word)</i>	Create a neologism, like televoracious.
malediction	<i>(a curse)</i>	The convict's muttered malediction was inaudible.
incredulous	<i>(not believing)</i>	Her incredulous expression showed her feelings.
omniscient	<i>(all-knowing)</i>	You can't keep secrets from an omniscient god.
monomania	<i>(obsession with one thing)</i>	It was a hobby that became a monomania.
specious	<i>(false)</i>	You have a convincing but unfortunately specious argument.
excoriate	<i>(verbally flog)</i>	His speech excoriated the opponent.
prototype	<i>(first model)</i>	We saw an early prototype of the Mustang.
xenophobia	<i>(fear of foreigners)</i>	It is a hostile, xenophobic country.
benediction	<i>(blessing)</i>	The Pope's smiling benediction was televised.
amorphous	<i>(shapeless)</i>	A gray, amorphous mass was in the corner.
preponderance	<i>(bulk)</i>	The preponderance of the evidence indicates guilt.
magnanimous	<i>(great-minded)</i>	His magnanimous victory speech showed generosity.

inter

between • among • with

The Latin stem **inter** is one of the most commonly found prefixes in the English language. **Inter** means *between, among, with, or even mutual or reciprocal*. It is different in meaning from its relatives **intra** and **intro**. Here is a small selection of the interesting words that contain **inter**:

interact:	to act reciprocally. The one interacts with the other, and each is changed.
intercalate:	to insert. We spent the evening intercalating the flyer into the newsletter.
interface:	a boundary plane. Ahab's sea surface was an interface between good and evil.
intermezzo:	short performance between acts. They went to the lobby during the intermezzo.
interim:	meantime. In the interim of Caesar's absence, the Gallic tribes had revolted.
interlope:	to intrude. She only intended to assist, not to interlope, in their affairs.
interpose:	to put between. A new barricade was interposed between troops and rebels.
interval:	a gap. A brief interval of silence occurred between the fusillades.
internuncio:	an envoy. The internuncio finally arrived, bringing the papal documents.
intervocalic:	between vowels. The witches' raspy intervocalics were insidious and evil.
intertribal:	among tribes. The emerging nation was wracked with intertribal conflicts.
intersperse:	to scatter among. Globular clusters were interspersed among the galaxies.
interpret:	to explain. The Apache guide nervously interpreted Geronimo's warning.
interplanetary:	between planets. Daily interplanetary travel became possible in 2123 A.D.
intertwine:	twist together. In <i>King Lear</i> the main plot and subplots are intertwined.
intertidal:	shore between low and high tide. Fiddler crabs inhabited the intertidal zone.
intervale:	bottom land. He planted corn down in the intervale near the stream.
intermediary:	a go-between. The ambassador acted as official intermediary between them.
interdict:	prohibit. They attempted to interdict arms traffic on the high seas.
intergalactic:	between galaxies. Intergalactic gravity links Andromeda and the Milky Way.
intercultural:	among cultures. Future survival will require intercultural understanding.

The Word Within the Word • Mystery Spelling #21

equivocate	equi voc ate
superfluous	super flu ous
bilateral	bi lat er al
circumspect	circum spect
commensurate	com mens ur ate
malevolence	mal e vol ence
neophyte	neo phyt e
misanthropist	mis anthrop ist
bellicose	bell ic ose
anthropomorphic	anthropo morph ic
captious	capt i ous
neologism	neo log ism
malediction	mal e dict ion
incredulous	in cred ul ous
omniscient	omni sci ent
monomania	mono mania
specious	spec i ous
excoriate	ex cori ate
prototype	proto type
xenophobia	xeno phobia
benediction	bene dict ion
amorphous	a morph ous
preponderance	pre pond er ance
magnanimous	magn anim ous
unilateral	uni lat er al

SYNTHESIS:

Use **magnanimous**, **equivocate**, and **malevolence** in one sentence.

DIVERGENCE:

How many things can you think of that could be described as **amorphous**?

ANALYSIS:

You might think that **excoriate** is a combination of **ex**, **cor**, and **ate**, but it isn't so. The **cor** in **excoriate** actually has a very different derivation and only happens to have the same spelling as the **cor** that we have studied. Look up the etymology of **excoriate** in a good dictionary and explain why this word is used to describe extremely abusive denunciation or verbal whipping.

EVALUATION:

Should the United States form its defense policy on a **unilateral** basis and let other nations deal with it as they wish, or should the United States work for a cooperative **bilateral** or **multilateral** defense policy through constant negotiations with other nations?

INTUITION:

Can you think of an explanation for something, an explanation which is commonly accepted as true, but which you suspect is **specious**?

EMOTION:

What emotional reaction would you have if you arrived home, and your brother greeted you at the door with **captious** questions about where you had been?

AESTHETICS:

Do you like abstract sculpture that is based on the human form in a vaguely **anthropomorphic** way, but which is not finely detailed?