

POTENT | Definitions

Listening

matrimony

Matrimony is just a fancy way of saying "marriage." When a couple ties the knot, they are engaging in *matrimony*.

(n) a union representing a special kind of social and legal partnership between two people

(n) the state of being a married couple voluntarily joined for life (or until divorce)

(n) the ceremony or sacrament of marriage

novel

If something is so new and original that it's never been seen, used or even thought of before, call it *novel*. The noun *novel* describes a book-length work of fiction.

(adj) not known or experienced before

(adj) original and of a kind not seen before

(adj) pleasantly new or different

agonizing

(adj) hard to accept or bear especially emotionally

(adj) extremely painful

(adj) intensely or unbearably painful

plight

A *plight* is a situation that's hard to get out of. Learning about the *plight* of people trying to rebuild their homes after a devastating earthquake might inspire you to send money to a charity.

(n) a situation from which extrication is difficult, especially an unpleasant or trying one

(n) a dangerous, difficult, or otherwise unfortunate situation

(n) a solemn pledge of fidelity

(n) (now rare) A (neutral) condition or state [from 14th c.]

(n) (now chiefly dialectal) An instance of danger or peril; a dangerous moment or situation

conjugal

The adjective *conjugal* describes all husband-and-wife matters, so if someone who is married says, "Single people don't understand how I feel," you can be sure it's a *conjugal* situation.

(adj) of or relating to marriage

(adj) of or relating to marriage or to the relationship between a wife and husband

prospect(ive)

If it's *prospective*, it hasn't happened yet. *Prospective* students are students who might attend a school in the future. If you visit any college campus, you'll see *prospective* students checking out the library, the dorms, and athletic facilities.

(n) the possibility of future success

(n) belief about (or mental picture of) the future

(adj) of or concerned with or related to the future

(adj) (of a person) expected or expecting to be something particular in the future

(adj) looking toward the future

(adj) effective in the future

(adj) looking forward in time; acting with foresight

Meaning

POTENT

Potent means really strong, but not like a body builder. Use *potent* instead to describe things like intense smells, powerful magic potions, and very influential people.

(adj) having or wielding force or authority

(adj) producing or capable of producing a desired result

(adj) having an abundance of some characteristic quality (as flavor)

(adj) having a strong physiological or chemical effect

(adj) (of a male) capable of copulation

POTENCY

Use the noun *potency* when you're talking about the strength of something. You could refer to the *potency* of a drug or the *potency* of a political leader.

(n) the ability to exert effort for the accomplishment of a task

(n) the power or right to give orders or make decisions

(n) capacity to produce strong physiological or chemical effects

(n) the state of being *potent*; a male's capacity to have sexual intercourse

(n) the inherent capacity for coming into being

POTENTLY

(adv) in a manner having a powerful influence

Cogent

When you make a *cogent* argument, it means your argument is clear and persuasive. In these days of 24-hour entertainment news and sound-bite sized explanations of complex government policy, it's hard to find a *cogent* argument amidst all the emotional outbursts.

(adj) having the power to persuade

(adj) powerfully persuasive

(adj) forceful and to the point, as a reason or argument; compelling; convincing

(adj) appealing to the intellect or powers of reasoning; convincing

Virile

You'll often hear the word *virile* referring to a manly, powerful man, because the word means having physical strength and other typical masculine qualities.

(adj) of, relating to, or marked by qualities traditionally associated with men

(adj) characteristic of a man

(adj) characterized by energy and **vigor**

(adj) (of a male) capable of copulation

Liable

If you drive into someone's fence, you'll probably be held *liable* — legally responsible — for fixing it. *Liable* can also mean "likely," usually with something unpleasant: "If you don't brush your teeth, they're *liable* to fall out."

(adj) being in a situation where one is likely to meet with harm

(adj) being the one who must meet an or suffer the consequences for (adj) failing to do so

(adj) subject to legal action

(adj) held legally responsible

(adj) (often followed by 'to') likely to be affected with

(adj) at risk of or subject to experiencing something usually unpleasant

Boil down

When you *boil down* something, you get it down to its essence. A summary of a book should *boil down* the story to the main idea. In cooking, it literally means to reduce liquid by boiling off the water.

(v) to make into a short statement of the main points (as of a report)

(v) cook until very little liquid is left

(v) reduce the volume of a liquid by boiling

(v) be cooked until very little liquid is left

(v) be the essential element

Bona fide

Something *bona fide* is the real deal, the real McCoy, genuine — it's not a fake or a counterfeit.

(adj) being exactly as appears or as claimed

(adj) not counterfeit or copied

(adj) undertaken in good faith

Hopped-up

(adj) full of enthusiasm or excitement

(adj) drugged; intoxicated

(adj) showing urgent desire or interest

(adj) being under the influence of narcotics

(adj) (of an automobile) having the engine modified to give extra power

QUAGMIRE | Definitions

Listening

tame

If something is *tame*, it cannot surprise or injure you. It's predictable. *Tame* can be used as an adjective or verb. A circus lion is *tame* (adjective) because it's been *tamed* (verb). A "lion-*tamer*" beat the wildness out of it.

(v) adapt (a wild plant or unclaimed land) to the environment

(v) overcome the wildness of; make docile and tractable

(v) if you *tame* someone or something that is dangerous, uncontrolled, or likely to cause trouble, you bring them under control

(v) make less strong or intense; soften

(v) correct by punishment or discipline

(v) make fit for cultivation, domestic life, and service to humans

(adj) domesticated

(adj) (of an animal) not dangerous or frightened of people

(adj) brought from wildness into a domesticated state

(adj) (informal) (of a person) willing to cooperate

bulk

Don't be intimidated by the *bulk* of the dictionary on your desk. If you look in it, you'll see that *bulk* is a small word used to talk about large things.

(n) the mass or size of something large

(n) the property resulting from being or relating to the greater in number of two parts

(n) the property possessed by a large mass

(n) the property of something that is great in magnitude

(n) you can refer to something's *bulk* when you want to emphasize that it is very large

(n) (of something) the main part of something; most of something

deploy

To *deploy* is to move into fighting formation, the way a military commander might *deploy* troops in preparation for a battle. You'll almost always find the word *deploy* in a military context.

(v) to distribute systematically or strategically

(v) to arrange or place in a particular way

(v) place troops or weapons in battle formation

(v) to *deploy* troops, weapons, or resources means to make them ready to be used

(v) to use something effectively

abundant

On Halloween, you can find candy in *abundant* supply. Use *abundant* to describe something that exists in large amounts that are more than what's needed.

(adj) existing or available in large quantities

(adj) present in great quantity

(adj) existing in large quantities; more than enough

preliminary

Preliminary means something that comes before something else. If you want to run in the race, you have to place in the top third of the *preliminary* round. It can also mean "early" — the *preliminary* results are in, and you've won!

(adj) preceding or done in preparation for something fuller or more important

(adj) denoting an action or event preceding or in preparation for something more important

(n) a *preliminary* is something that you do at the beginning of an activity, often as a form of preparation

Meaning

QUAGMIRE

A *quagmire* is a dangerous place, like the muddy shoreline of a pond. Because it's so hard to climb out of a *quagmire*, the word has also come to mean any difficult or sticky situation you find yourself in.

(n) a soft wet area of low-lying land that sinks underfoot

(n) a situation from which extrication is difficult especially an unpleasant or trying one

(n) a **swampy**, soggy area of ground

(n) a *quagmire* is a difficult, complicated, or unpleasant situation which is not easy to avoid or escape from

QUAG(GY)

(n) a soft wet area of low-lying land that sinks underfoot

(n) a **marshy** or boggy place

(n) another word for *quagmire*

(adj) (of soil) soft and watery

(adj) resembling a marsh or *quagmire*; boggy

(adj) yielding, soft, or flabby

Morass

A *morass* is a mushy, muddy patch of ground that you might find in a bog. In other words, it's something you probably don't want to **get stuck in**.

(n) an area of muddy or boggy ground

(n) anything that entraps or makes progress difficult

(n) an unpleasant and complicated situation that is difficult to escape from

Tangle

A *tangle* is a jumble. You might have a *tangle* of cords behind your computer or a tangle of complications related to your taxes. Whatever it is, once something is in a *tangle*, it's difficult to sort out.

- (v) to become mixed together or intertwined
- (v) twist together or entwine into a confusing mass
- (v) make (something) complicated or confused
- (v) force into some kind of situation, condition, or course of action
- (n) a *tangle* of something is a mass of it twisted together in an untidy way
- (n) (informal) a disagreement or fight

Panacea

If someone offers you a pill that promises eternal life, don't take the pill. It's a *panacea*, a remedy that falsely claims to solve every problem ever.

- (n) something that will solve all problems.
- (n) hypothetical remedy for all ills or diseases; once sought by the alchemists
- (n) a solution or remedy for all difficulties or diseases
- (n) (for something) something that will solve all the problems of a particular situation

Bog down

- (v) to become stuck (as if in a bog) and unable to progress
- (v) get stuck while doing something
- (v) be unable to move further
- (v) cause to slow down or get stuck
- (v) if a plan or process bogs down or if something bogs it down, it is delayed and no progress is made

Get stuck on (someone/something)

- (v) attached, as if by glue, to someone or something
- (v) in love with someone or something; entranced with someone or something
- (v) to be locked into an idea, cause, or purpose
- (v) to be confused by something, such as a puzzle or a task

Can of worms

- (n) (informal) if you open up a *can of worms*, you start doing something that will cause a lot of problems and be very difficult
- (n) a source of unpredictable trouble and complexity
- (n) a complicated problem
- (n) a complicated matter likely to prove awkward or embarrassing

ACCEDE | Definitions

Listening

substantiate

To *substantiate* is to give support to a claim. We'd really like to believe in the Tooth Fairy; however, more evidence is needed to *substantiate* her existence (besides that quarter in your pocket).

- (v) to verify something by supplying evidence
- (v) establish or strengthen as with new evidence or facts
- (v) to provide information or evidence to prove that something is true
- (v) represent in bodily form
- (v) solidify, firm, or strengthen

(v) make real or concrete; give reality or substance to

relinquish

If you *relinquish* something, you let it go. You *relinquish* control of the army when you resign as general. You *relinquish* your plan to sneak into town when your parents find out what's going on.

(v) to stop having something, especially when this happens unwillingly

(v) turn away from

(v) voluntarily cease to keep or claim; give up

(v) do without or cease to hold or adhere to

(v) part with a possession or right

(v) release, as from one's grip

erroneous(ly)

If you've done something *erroneously*, you've made a mistake or accidentally given out wrong information. If you *erroneously* accuse your brother of eating the last slice of your pecan pie, then you're wrong: he didn't do it.

(adj) containing or characterized by error

(adj) not correct; based on wrong information

(adj) (adv) beliefs, opinions, or methods that are *erroneous* are incorrect or only partly correct

(adv) in a way that is not correct or that is based on wrong information

(adv) in a mistaken manner

(adv) incorrectly

keep one's fingers crossed

(v) to hope for luck or success in something

(v) if you are *keeping your fingers crossed*, you are hoping for a positive outcome

(v) to hope that nothing will happen to bring bad luck or to ruin one's plans

Meaning

ACCEDE

If you *accede*, it means you agree with someone or give in to his or her wish. The word is often used in a political context — the Queen *acceded* to the Prince's demands for more territory, a larger army, and funnier jesters.

(v) yield to another's wish or opinion

(v) agree or express agreement

(v) take on duties or office

(v) become a member of an organization

(v) when a member of a royal family *accedes* to the throne, they become king or queen

ACCESSION

Accession is the act of advancing into a position. Being elected class president is a kind of *accession*.

(n) the act of attaining or gaining access to a new office or right or position (especially the throne)

(n) agreeing with or consenting to (often unwillingly)

(n) (civil law) the right to all of that which your property produces whether by growth or improvement

(n) a process of increasing by addition (as to a collection or group)

(n) something added to what you already have

(n) the right to enter

(v) make a record of additions to a collection, such as a library

Acquiesce

To *acquiesce* is to agree to something or to give in. If your kid sister is refusing to hand over the television remote, you hope she *acquiesces* before your favorite show comes on.

(v) (in/to something) to accept something without arguing, even if you do not really agree with it

(v) agree or express agreement

(v) if you *acquiesce* in something, you agree to do what someone wants or to accept what they do even though you may not agree with it

Assent

Assent means agreement. If you nod your head in *assent*, you agree to something or you *assent* to it.

(v) to agree, to give approval

(v) agree or express agreement

(v) to admit a thing as true

(n) agreement with a statement or proposal to do something

(n) official agreement to or approval of something

Demur

If your mother asks you to clean your room and you refuse, you *demur*. And if your friend invites you to the Death Metal Forever concert but you hesitate, you *demur*. Whether you object, politely disagree, or hesitate, you *demur*.

(v) raise objections or show reluctance

(v) take exception to

(v) enter a *demurrer*

(v) if you *demur*, you say that you do not agree with something or will not do something that you have been asked to do

(n) (law) a formal objection to an opponent's pleadings

Toe the line

The idiom *toe the line* means to follow the rules or act in the way people expect you to. If you show up to class on time and refrain from riding your skateboard down the halls, you *toe the line* at school.

(v) accept the authority, policies, or principles of a particular group, especially unwillingly

(v) do what is expected

(v) if you *toe the line*, you behave in the way that people in authority expect you to

(v) to abide by the rules or conventions

Knuckle under

(v) consent reluctantly

(v) to yield or cooperate when pressured or forced to do so

(v) if you *knuckle under*, you do what someone else tells you to do or what a situation forces you to do, because you realize that you have no choice

(v) (informal) to accept somebody else's authority

Bow out

(v) remove oneself from an obligation

(v) retire gracefully

(v) withdraw or retire from an activity or role

(v) if you *bow out* of something, you stop taking part in it

(v) to stop taking part in an activity, especially one in which you have been successful in the past