

ROOT OF THE DAY

spec / spect / spic — *Latin specere — to look, to see · “look, see”*

retrospect — retro- (back) + spect (look) = a look back at the past
circumspect — circum- (around) + spect (look) = looking all around → cautious, wary
prospect — pro- (forward) + spect (look) = a looking ahead → an expectation
conspicuous — con- (intensive) + spic (look) + -uous = clearly visible, standing out
perspective — per- (through) + spect (look) = a way of looking at things
introspect — intro- (within) + spect (look) = to look inward at one's own thoughts

POWER WORDS

amnesty *n.*
“The Court declined to grant a blanket amnesty to projects that had begun work without prior environmental clearance.”
Meaning: an official pardon for past offences
Syn: pardon · **Ant:** penalty
HOOK: A-MNES(ia) for the state — the state chooses to forget the offence.

jurisprudence *n.*
“Reservation jurisprudence has evolved steadily from Indra Sawhney to Janhit Abhiyan.”
Meaning: the theory, philosophy, or accumulated body of law
Syn: legal theory · **Ant:** lawlessness
HOOK: juris (law) + prudence (wisdom) = the wisdom of the law.

reciprocal *adj.*
“India weighed whether to answer the tariff with a reciprocal duty on American imports.”
Meaning: given, felt, or done in return; mutual
Syn: mutual · **Ant:** one-sided
HOOK: reci-PRO-cal = 'pro' each other, back and forth.

sanction *n./v.*
“Parliament's sanction was needed before the Bill became law, even as the courts threatened to sanction violators.”
Meaning: (n.) official approval; (v.) to penalise — a contronym meaning both
Syn: approve / penalise · **Ant:** forbid / pardon
HOOK: SANCTION cuts both ways — it can bless or blast.

regularise *v.*
“The Court refused to routinely regularise projects that had flouted the EIA Notification.”
Meaning: to make lawful or official something previously irregular
Syn: legitimise · **Ant:** outlaw
HOOK: make it 'regular' — by the book.

escalate *v.*
“The additional duty threatened to escalate the India-US trade dispute into a full trade war.”
Meaning: to increase rapidly in intensity, scale, or extent
Syn: intensify · **Ant:** de-escalate
HOOK: like an ESCALATOR — it only goes up.

unilateral *adj.*
“Critics called the additional 25% duty a unilateral levy imposed without any reciprocal concession from India.”
Meaning: done or decided by one side alone, without others' agreement
Syn: one-sided · **Ant:** bilateral
HOOK: UNI- = one → one side decides everything.

mitigate *v.*
“Strict safeguards were imposed to mitigate the harm caused by delayed environmental clearances.”
Meaning: to make less severe, serious, or painful
Syn: alleviate · **Ant:** aggravate
HOOK: mit- (mild) → to make milder.

autonomy *n.*
“The trade dispute tested India's strategic autonomy in choosing its own energy partners.”
Meaning: the right or condition of self-government; independence
Syn: independence · **Ant:** subjugation
HOOK: auto (self) + nomos (law) = self-rule.

dissent *n./v.*
“The EWS verdict was upheld 3:2, with two judges recording a strong dissent.”
Meaning: to hold or express an opinion at variance with the majority
Syn: disagreement · **Ant:** consensus
HOOK: dis- (apart) + sentire (to feel) = to feel apart.

moratorium *n.*
“Activists demanded a moratorium on all fresh clearances until the safeguards were framed.”
Meaning: a temporary, official suspension of an activity
Syn: suspension · **Ant:** resumption
HOOK: mora (Latin: delay) → a pause button on the law.

ceiling *n.*
“The Court found the eight-lakh income ceiling for EWS eligibility prima facie reasonable.”
Meaning: an upper limit set on something
Syn: cap · **Ant:** floor
HOOK: the CEILING is the top you cannot cross.

CONFUSABLE PAIRS — DON'T MIX THESE UP

principle *vs* **principal**
principle: a fundamental rule, truth, or standard (noun only)
principal: chief or most important; also the head of a school or a sum of money
TIP: The princIPAL is your PAL (or the main one); a principLE is a ruLE.

prescribe *vs* **proscribe**
prescribe: to recommend or lay down authoritatively (a rule, a medicine)
proscribe: to forbid or prohibit something officially
TIP: PRO-scribe = PROhibit; pre-scribe = advise beforehand.

amend *vs* **emend**
amend: to change or improve a law or document formally
emend: to correct errors in a written text
TIP: aMend a law for iMprovement; Emend an Essay for Errors.

statute *vs* **statue**
statute: a written law formally passed by a legislature
statue: a carved or cast figure of a person or animal
TIP: A statuTE has a 'T' for legislaTe; a statue just stands there, mute.

mitigate *vs* **militate**
mitigate: to make something less severe or harmful
militate: to be a powerful factor against something (usually 'militate against')
TIP: MitiGATE lessens harm; miliTATE (like 'military') fights against.

IDIOMS & ONE-WORD SUBSTITUTION

Idioms in context

- **a level playing field** — a situation in which everyone competes on fair and equal terms
“Domestic manufacturers argued that a 50% tariff destroyed any level playing field with foreign rivals.”

One-word substitution

- a person appointed to settle a dispute between two parties outside courts → **arbitrator**
- an official order issued by a court or ruler that has the force of law



- **the thin end of the wedge** — a small change or demand that marks the start of a much larger, unwelcome one
"Opposition MPs warned that criminalising insult to the national song was the thin end of the wedge for free speech."
- **sit on the fence** — to avoid taking sides or committing to a decision
"On the reservation question the government could no longer afford to sit on the fence."
- **throw the book at** — to punish or charge someone as severely as the rules or law allow
"After the repeat violation, the regulator threw the book at the firm, imposing the maximum statutory penalty."

- the formal withdrawal of a state or region from a larger union → **secession**
- a person who commits a civil wrong or tort → **tortfeasor**
- a person against whom a legal case or claim is brought → **defendant**

WORDS IN THE WILD — FROM TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

- **ex-post-facto** — with retrospective effect; applying to acts done before the law or approval existed
"The Supreme Court held that ex-post-facto environmental clearances may be granted only in exceptional cases that clear a strict public-interest test." — Indian Express, 30 Jul 2026
- **tariff** — a tax or duty imposed by a government on imported or exported goods
"The United States raised its cumulative tariff on Indian goods to 50%, among the highest it levies on any country." — Indian Express, 30 Jul 2026
- **indigenisation** — the process of developing or manufacturing something within one's own country rather than importing it
"The first C-295 transport aircraft assembled at Vadodara marked a milestone in India's defence indigenisation." — Indian Express, 30 Jul 2026
- **precautionary** — taken as a measure of caution, in advance, to prevent possible future harm
"The Court invoked the precautionary principle, reading the right to a clean environment into Article 21." — Indian Express, 30 Jul 2026

LEGAL & LATIN TERMS EVERY ASPIRANT MUST KNOW

- **prima facie** — on the face of it; at first sight — accepted as correct until disproved
- **ex post facto** — with retrospective effect; done or made after the fact
- **mutatis mutandis** — with the necessary changes having been made
- **ratio decidendi** — the legal principle or reason on which a court's decision rests (binding)
- **obiter dicta** — remarks made by a judge in passing, not essential to the decision (not binding)
- **locus standi** — the right or capacity to bring an action or be heard by a court
- **suo motu** — on its own motion; a court acting without a formal petition
- **mens rea** — a guilty mind; the mental element of a crime
- **actus reus** — the guilty act; the physical element of a crime
- **res judicata** — a matter already finally decided by a competent court; bars re-litigation
- **ultra vires** — beyond the legal power or authority of a person or body
- **amicus curiae** — 'friend of the court'; a neutral party who assists the court

RECALL CHECK — WORDS FROM EARLIER

promulgate (learnt 7 days ago) — meaning: _____

PRACTICE DRILL

- The word 'amnesty' most nearly means:
 A) a heavy penalty for repeat offenders · B) a general pardon for past offences · C) a formal accusation made in court · D) a temporary ceasefire between armies
- A 'unilateral' decision is one that is:
 A) done or decided by one side alone · B) agreed jointly by all the parties · C) requiring the prior approval of a court · D) capable of being reversed at will
- A law that operates 'ex post facto' is one that:
 A) operates only prospectively, for the future · B) concerns a matter already finally decided · C) operates retrospectively, on acts already done · D) is passed beyond the legislature's powers
- In legal usage, 'prima facie' means:
 A) beyond all reasonable doubt · B) considered as a whole · C) after the relevant fact · D) on the face of it, at first sight
- Choose the correct word: 'Parliament passed a Bill to ____ the 1971 Act.'
 A) emend · B) amend · C) commend · D) mend
- A 'moratorium' is best defined as:
 A) a temporary, official suspension of an activity · B) a permanent and total prohibition · C) an immediate order to enforce a rule · D) a monetary penalty imposed for default
- Which word is the closest synonym of 'mitigate'?
 A) aggravate · B) litigate · C) instigate · D) alleviate
- The word 'sanction' can, as a contronym, mean BOTH:
 A) to praise and to blame · B) to begin and to end · C) to permit and to penalise · D) to buy and to sell
- When a court acts 'suo motu', it acts:
 A) on its own motion, without a petition · B) only after hearing an appeal · C) with the unanimous consent of the parties · D) in excess of its jurisdiction
- Complete correctly: 'A doctor may ____ medicine, but the law may ____ certain drugs.'
 A) proscribe ... prescribe · B) prescribe ... proscribe · C) prescribe ... prescribe · D) proscribe ... proscribe

Answer key: 1-B · 2-A · 3-C · 4-D · 5-B · 6-A · 7-D · 8-C · 9-A · 10-B

ETYMOLOGY TRAIL

When the Supreme Court looked back — a true retrospect, from Latin *retro* (back) + *specere* (to look) — it refused to grant a blanket **amnesty** to projects seeking post-facto clearance. A circumspect bench, literally 'looking around' with caution, applied the precautionary principle to **mitigate** environmental harm. Half away, a **unilateral** tariff and a fresh push for indigenisation showed that every act of policy, like every word, carries its origins on its sleeve.

