

ROOT OF THE DAY

vert / vers — *Latin vertere, versum* — to turn · “turn”

subvert — sub- (under) + vert (turn) = to turn from beneath → to undermine or overthrow an established order

incontrovertible — in- (not) + contra (against) + vert (turn) = that cannot be turned against → beyond dispute

inadvertent — in- (not) + ad- (toward) + vert (turn) = not turning one's mind toward → unintentional, done by oversight

divert — di(s)- (aside) + vert (turn) = to turn aside → to redirect funds, traffic or attention elsewhere

reversion — re- (back) + vers (turned) + -ion = a turning back → in property law, the return of an estate to the grantor

adversary — ad- (toward, against) + vers (turned) = one turned against you → the opposing party in the adversarial system

POWER WORDS

obviate *v.*

“A speaking order at the first stage would obviate the need for most appeals.”

Meaning: to remove a need or difficulty in advance; to make unnecessary

Syn: to preclude the need for · **Ant:** to necessitate

HOOK: ob- (in the way) + via (road): meet the problem on the road and clear it before it arrives.

abjure *v.*

“The accord required both militias to abjure violence before any talks on autonomy could begin.”

Meaning: to renounce a belief, claim or course of action solemnly

Syn: to forswear · **Ant:** to espouse

HOOK: ab- (away) + jurare (to swear): to swear something away, on oath.

derogate *v.*

“No emergency measure may derogate from the right not to be tortured.”

Meaning: to detract from or depart from a right, rule or standard (usually 'derogate from')

Syn: to detract from · **Ant:** to uphold

HOOK: de- (away) + rogare (to propose a law): originally, to repeal part of a law. A 'derogation' is a permitted departure from a treaty duty.

extant *adj.*

“Only two extant copies of the original grant deed were produced before the court.”

Meaning: still in existence; surviving

Syn: surviving · **Ant:** lost

HOOK: ex- (out) + stare (to stand): what still stands out, while everything else has gone.

recuse *v.*

“The judge chose to recuse herself because she had once advised one of the parties.”

Meaning: (of a judge) to withdraw from hearing a case because of a possible conflict of interest

Syn: to step aside · **Ant:** to preside

HOOK: Latin recusare, to refuse or object: the judge refuses the case to keep the bench above suspicion.

perfunctory *adj.*

“A perfunctory hearing that ignores the objector's documents does not satisfy natural justice.”

Meaning: carried out with minimum effort, as a formality, without real care

Syn: cursory · **Ant:** thorough

HOOK: Latin perfungi, to get through a duty: a perfunctory act is one merely got through, not done.

exculpate *v.*

“The forensic report did not exculpate the accused; it merely failed to connect him to the weapon.”

Meaning: to clear someone formally from blame or guilt

Syn: to exonerate · **Ant:** to incriminate

HOOK: ex- (out of) + culpa (blame), as in culpable: to take someone out of the blame.

contravene *v.*

“A notification that contravenes the parent Act cannot survive judicial review, however well-intentioned it is.”

Meaning: to violate or act against a law, rule or treaty

Syn: to infringe · **Ant:** to comply with

HOOK: contra (against) + venire (to come): to come against the rule.

inchoate *adj.*

“Attempt, conspiracy and abetment are inchoate offences: the law punishes them even though the intended crime was never completed.”

Meaning: just begun and not yet fully formed or developed

Syn: incipient · **Ant:** complete

HOOK: Latin inchoare, to begin: an inchoate crime is one caught at its beginning.

nugatory *adj.*

“If the tribunal's orders cannot be enforced, the right of appeal it grants becomes nugatory.”

Meaning: of no value or force; futile

Syn: ineffectual · **Ant:** effective

HOOK: Latin nugae, trifles: courts refuse readings that render a provision nugatory, a mere trifle.

obdurate *adj.*

“Faced with an obdurate employer, the union took its grievance to the labour court.”

Meaning: stubbornly refusing to change one's opinion or course of action

Syn: intransigent · **Ant:** amenable

HOOK: ob- (against) + durus (hard), as in durable: hardened against every argument.

CONFUSABLE PAIRS — DON'T MIX THESE UP

flout *vs* **flaunt**

flout: to openly disregard a rule or law (verb)

flaunt: to display something ostentatiously (verb)

TIP: You FLOUT the LAW; you FLAUNT your wealth. A rule is never flaunted.

judicial *vs* **judicious**

judicial: relating to courts or judges (adj.)

judicious: showing good judgment; wise and sensible (adj.)

TIP: A judicial order comes from a court; a judicious choice comes from a sound mind, court or no court.

discreet *vs* **discrete**

discreet: careful and prudent, especially in keeping confidences (adj.)

discrete: separate and distinct (adj.)

TIP: In discreTE the T separates the two e's: discrete parts stand apart.

venal *vs* **venial**

venal: open to bribery; corrupt (adj.)

venial: minor and pardonable (adj.)

TIP: VENAL officials are for sALe; a venial fault is one you can forgive.

disinterested *vs* **uninterested**

disinterested: impartial; having no personal stake (adj.)

uninterested: not interested; indifferent (adj.)

TIP: A judge must be DISinterested (no stake) but never UNinterested (bored).

IDIOMS & ONE-WORD SUBSTITUTION

One-word substitution

• a person who has made a valid will → **testator**



Idioms in context

- **pass the buck** — to shift responsibility for a problem onto someone else
“When software flags a mismatch and leaves the voter to clear it, critics say the system passes the buck to the citizen.”
- **at the eleventh hour** — at the last possible moment
“The waiver arrived at the eleventh hour, just before the new tariffs were due to take effect.”
- **a double-edged sword** — something that has both favourable and unfavourable consequences
“Cheap imported sulphur was a double-edged sword: it kept fertiliser costs low but left the industry exposed to supply shocks.”
- **a red herring** — a misleading clue or argument that distracts from the real issue
“Defence counsel’s long attack on the complainant’s motives was a red herring; the only question was whether the signature was forged.”
- a person who undertakes to pay or perform if another person defaults → **surety**
- government by a group of old people or elders → **gerontocracy**
- a person who repeatedly relapses into crime after being punished → **recidivist**
- a period between two reigns or governments when normal authority is suspended → **interregnum**

WORDS IN THE WILD — FROM TODAY’S NEWSPAPER

- **valedictory** — serving as a farewell or closing address; marking the end of an event
“She was addressing the valedictory session of a two-day international conference on “The Future of Environment and Climate Dynamics”, organised by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.” — CLAT Gurukul Daily Brief, 21 Sep 2026 — ‘Justice Nagarathna on the ecocentric approach’
- **entail** — to involve something as a necessary part or consequence
“Justice Nagarathna put the consequence plainly: this entails recognising that human interests do not, simply by virtue of being human, enjoy automatic precedence over the interests of the non-human world.” — CLAT Gurukul Daily Brief, 21 Sep 2026 — ‘Justice Nagarathna on the ecocentric approach’
- **calibrated** — carefully adjusted or measured to produce a precise effect
“The language is carefully calibrated.” — CLAT Gurukul Daily Brief, 21 Sep 2026 — ‘Jaishankar at UNGA 81 and the US Russia sanctions law’
- **compound** — (verb) to make a problem or difficulty worse
“Two further pressures compound the squeeze.” — CLAT Gurukul Daily Brief, 21 Sep 2026 — ‘Sulphur price surge and India’s fertiliser imports’

LEGAL & LATIN TERMS EVERY ASPIRANT MUST KNOW

- **nemo judex in causa sua** — no one should be a judge in his own cause; the rule against bias in natural justice
- **volenti non fit injuria** — to a willing person no injury is done; consent as a defence in tort
- **damnum sine injuria** — damage without legal injury; actual loss with no legal right violated, so no action lies
- **injuria sine damno** — legal injury without actual damage; violation of a legal right is actionable even without loss
- **ubi jus ibi remedium** — where there is a right, there is a remedy
- **nemo dat quod non habet** — no one gives what he does not have; a seller cannot pass a better title than his own
- **consensus ad idem** — agreement on the same thing in the same sense; the meeting of minds a contract requires
- **quantum meruit** — as much as he has deserved; reasonable payment for work actually done
- **per incuriam** — through lack of care; a decision given in ignorance of a binding statute or precedent, which is not binding
- **lis pendens** — a pending suit; property in dispute cannot be transferred so as to defeat the suit
- **ejusdem generis** — of the same kind; general words that follow specific ones are read as limited to the same class
- **nulla poena sine lege** — no punishment without law; a person can be punished only under a law in force at the time of the act

PRACTICE DRILL

1. Attempt, conspiracy and abetment are called 'inchoate' offences because they:
A) are punished even though the intended crime was never completed · B) can be tried only by a Sessions Court · C) require no guilty mind at all · D) are always compoundable by the victim
2. An interpretation that renders a statutory provision 'nugatory' makes that provision:
A) retrospective in effect · B) binding on all courts · C) of no practical force or effect · D) applicable only in emergencies
3. A judge who 'recuses' herself from a case:
A) delivers a dissenting opinion · B) withdraws from hearing it because of a possible conflict of interest · C) refers it to a larger bench · D) decides it without hearing the parties
4. 'Subvert', 'inadvertent' and 'incontrovertible' share a root meaning:
A) to write · B) to send · C) to break · D) to turn
5. A seller with a defective title cannot give the buyer a good title. This is expressed by the maxim:
A) quantum meruit · B) volenti non fit injuria · C) nemo dat quod non habet · D) lis pendens
6. Choose the correct sentence:
A) The company continued to flout the pollution norms despite repeated notices. · B) The company continued to flaunt the pollution norms despite repeated notices. · C) The minister flouted his new car at the rally. · D) The rules were flaunted by the contractor without penalty.
7. In 'Two further pressures compound the squeeze', the word 'compound' means:
A) to settle an offence out of court · B) to mix two chemicals · C) to enclose with a wall · D) to make worse
8. Official language described as 'carefully calibrated' is language that is:
A) hastily drafted · B) precisely measured to produce a particular effect · C) deliberately hostile · D) translated from another language
9. 'To derogate from a right' most nearly means:
A) to detract from or depart from it · B) to enlarge its scope · C) to register it formally · D) to transfer it to another person
10. An official who shifts the blame for a delay onto a subordinate is said to:
A) hold all the cards · B) bury the hatchet · C) pass the buck · D) cross the Rubicon

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

ETYMOLOGY TRAIL

Everything today turns on Latin *vertere*, to turn. An adversary is one turned against you; an inadvertent error is one where the mind never turned toward the danger; to subvert is to turn an order upside down from beneath. A good law obviates disputes, but one that contravenes the Constitution, or lets a **perfunctory** hearing deplete from natural justice, invites challenge. Faced with an **obdurate** authority that tries to pass the buck, the court may declare its order **nugatory**, and a judge with personal stake must **recuse** herself, because only incontrovertible fairness can **exculpate** the process.

