

ROOT OF THE DAY

ten / tin / tain — *Latin tenere, tentum — to hold, to keep · “hold; keep”*

tenant — ten (hold) + -ant = one who holds → a person who holds land or premises under a lease granted by the owner

tenure — ten (hold) + -ure = the holding → the period for which an office or a piece of land is held, and the terms on which it is held

abstain — abs- (away from) + tain (hold) = to hold oneself away → to decline to vote, or to refrain from an act one is entitled to do

pertain — per- (thoroughly) + tain (hold) = to hold through to → to belong to or be relevant to, as evidence pertaining to the charge

detention — de- (away) + tent (hold) = a holding away → confinement of a person, which Article 22 hedges with safeguards

retention — re- (back) + tent (hold) = a holding back → keeping documents, records or a lien over property instead of parting with them

tenacious — ten (hold) + -acious = holding fast → persistent and unwilling to let go, as a claimant who is tenacious about an old title

POWER WORDS

construe *v.*

“A penal provision must be construed strictly, and any real doubt resolved in favour of the accused.”

Meaning: to interpret the meaning and legal effect of a statute, clause or document

Syn: to interpret · **Ant:** to misread

HOOK: con- (together) + struere (to build): you build the sense of the words together.

inculpate *v.*

“A confession that inculpates a co-accused carries very limited weight on its own.”

Meaning: to suggest or establish that a person is guilty; to incriminate

Syn: to implicate · **Ant:** to absolve

HOOK: in- (into) + culpa (fault): to bring somebody into the fault.

lacuna *n.*

“The Bench declined to fill what it called a lacuna in the statute, holding that the remedy lay with Parliament.”

Meaning: a gap or missing part, especially in a law, a record or a chain of evidence

Syn: a gap · **Ant:** completeness

HOOK: Latin lacuna, a pit or pool: a hole in the text where a rule should have been.

ameliorate *v.*

“The scheme was defended as a measure to ameliorate the condition of landless workers.”

Meaning: to make a bad or unsatisfactory condition better

Syn: to improve · **Ant:** to worsen

HOOK: Latin melior, better: to make it melior, better than it was.

cogent *adj.*

“Departing from a precedent of a coordinate Bench requires cogent reasons, recorded in the judgment.”

Meaning: clear, logical and convincing

Syn: compelling · **Ant:** flimsy

HOOK: co- (together) + agere (to drive): reasons that drive the listener to the conclusion.

contumacious *adj.*

“Contumacious disobedience of an undertaking given to the court is punishable as civil contempt.”

Meaning: wilfully disobedient to the order or authority of a court

Syn: defiant · **Ant:** obedient

HOOK: Latin contumax, insolent: the party who will not bend even to the judge.

perverse *adj.*

“A finding is perverse when no reasonable person could have reached it on the material on record.”

Meaning: unreasonable; contrary to the weight of the evidence or to settled law

Syn: unreasonable · **Ant:** sound

HOOK: per- (astray) + vertere (to turn): a perverse finding has turned right away from the evidence.

vexatious *adj.*

“Costs were imposed because the suit was vexatious and had been filed only to keep the property in dispute.”

Meaning: brought without sufficient grounds, mainly to annoy or harass the other side

Syn: harassing · **Ant:** bona fide

HOOK: Latin vexare, to shake or harass: litigation filed to shake the opponent, not to win.

imprimatur *n.*

“A circular issued by a department does not acquire the imprimatur of law merely because it has been followed for years.”

Meaning: official approval or sanction that gives something authority

Syn: sanction · **Ant:** disapproval

HOOK: Latin imprimatur, 'let it be printed': the licence once stamped on a book before it could be published.

bulwark *n.*

“Judicial review has been described as a bulwark against arbitrary executive action.”

Meaning: a defence or protection against something harmful

Syn: safeguard · **Ant:** weak point

HOOK: From an old word for a rampart of logs (bole-work): the wall you stand behind.

CONFUSABLE PAIRS — DON'T MIX THESE UP

lessee *vs* **lessor**

lessee: the person who takes property on lease, that is, the tenant (n.)

lessor: the person who grants the lease, that is, the owner (n.)

TIP: The lesSEE receives (like employee, payee, trustee); the lessOR gives, like a donor or a vendor.

assent *vs* **ascent**

assent: formal agreement or approval, as the President's assent to a Bill (n./v.)

ascent: a climb or upward movement (n.)

TIP: AsSENT is what you SEND when you agree; asCENT is the climb, as in ascending a hill.

defuse *vs* **diffuse**

defuse: to remove the danger from a situation, as one defuses a bomb (v.)

diffuse: to spread out widely; or, as an adjective, wordy and unfocused (v./adj.)

TIP: Defuse takes out the fuse; a diffuse argument is spread too thin to bite.

libel *vs* **slander**

libel: defamation in a permanent form, such as writing, print or a broadcast (n.)

slander: defamation in a transient form, chiefly spoken words or gestures (n.)

TIP: LibeL is Letters and Lasting; slander is said aloud and gone. Libel is actionable without proof of special damage.

allude *vs* **elude**

allude: to refer to something indirectly (v.)

elude: to escape from or avoid something, often skilfully (v.)

TIP: You allude to a case you do not name; an accused eludes the police. AL- points at it, E- runs out of it.

IDIOMS & ONE-WORD SUBSTITUTION



Idioms in context

- a **paper tiger** — something that looks powerful but has no real force behind it
“A regulator with no power to impose penalties, the petitioners said, is a paper tiger.”
- to **kick the can down the road** — to postpone a difficult decision instead of settling it now
“Adjourning the reference for the third time only kicks the can down the road.”
- to **give short shrift to** — to dismiss something quickly and with little consideration
“The Bench gave short shrift to the plea that the notice had never been received.”
- **chapter and verse** — the exact authority or precise reference for a statement
“Counsel was asked to give chapter and verse for the claim that the rule had been notified.”

One-word substitution

- a witness's evidence taken on oath outside the courtroom and recorded for use in the case → **deposition**
- the surrender of an accused person by one State to another for trial or punishment → **extradition**
- a person appointed by a court to hold and manage disputed property while the case runs → **receiver**
- the person named in a will to carry out the directions the testator has left → **executor**
- one who secretly damages property or work in order to obstruct an opponent → **saboteur**

WORDS IN THE WILD — FROM TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

- **justiciable** — capable of being decided and enforced by a court, rather than left to the political branches
“The parallel with the Declaration is exact: a non-justiciable statement of developmental obligation that nonetheless shapes law and policy, and which courts have progressively read into an enforceable right.” — CLAT Gurukul Daily Brief, 23 Sep 2026 — ‘Right to Development at 40: UNGA meet’
- **leverage** — the power to influence another party's conduct, because of something you control that they need
“Whoever controls it can convert an economic relationship into leverage.” — CLAT Gurukul Daily Brief, 23 Sep 2026 — ‘Reformed multilateralism and the 4F crisis at UNGA 81’
- **threshold** — the level or limit at which a rule, duty or consequence begins to apply
“Projects in the Schedule to the 2006 notification cannot be built, expanded or modernised beyond specified thresholds without prior environmental clearance.” — CLAT Gurukul Daily Brief, 23 Sep 2026 — ‘ELA amendment: port clearances now valid 20 years’
- **concessional** — offered on terms easier than the market would give, such as a lower rate of interest or charge
“A concessional swap window means the central bank offers the swap at a rate below what the market would charge, absorbing the difference itself.” — CLAT Gurukul Daily Brief, 23 Sep 2026 — ‘RBI swap window inflows cross \$143 bn’

LEGAL & LATIN TERMS EVERY ASPIRANT MUST KNOW

- **in limine** — at the threshold; a petition dismissed in limine is thrown out at the very first hearing, without notice to the other side
- **pendente lite** — while the suit is pending; maintenance or an injunction granted pendent lite lasts only until the case is decided
- **res gestae** — things done; facts so connected with the main transaction that they form part of it and are admissible in evidence
- **status quo ante** — the state of affairs as it existed before; parties are often directed to restore it pending a decision
- **quid pro quo** — something for something; the exchange of one thing for another, and the essence of consideration in a contract
- **inter vivos** — between living persons; a gift or transfer made during the donor's lifetime, as opposed to one by will
- **actus curiae neminem gravabit** — an act of the court shall prejudice no one; a litigant must not suffer for the court's own delay or error
- **de minimis non curat lex** — the law does not concern itself with trifles; a harm too slight to matter gives no cause of action
- **vis major** — a greater force; an irresistible natural event, such as a flood or an earthquake, which may excuse performance
- **corpus delicti** — the body of the offence; the essential facts showing that the crime charged was actually committed

PRACTICE DRILL

1. 'Abstain', 'pertain' and 'detention' are built on a root that means:
A) to speak or declare · B) to hold or keep · C) to carry or bear · D) to bind or tie
2. A contumacious party is one who:
A) has been wrongly joined to the proceedings · B) cannot afford to engage counsel of choice · C) appears in person instead of through an advocate · D) wilfully disobeys the order of the court
3. In 'a non-justiciable statement of developmental obligation', 'justiciable' describes a claim that:
A) a court can decide and enforce · B) a treaty has expressly excluded · C) a State has voted against · D) a statute has already satisfied
4. Counsel asked to construe a clause is being asked to:
A) prove that it was signed by both parties · B) show that it was inserted by mistake · C) interpret its meaning and legal effect · D) argue that it should be struck down
5. Maintenance ordered to run only while the suit is being heard is granted:
A) in limine · B) pendent lite · C) inter vivos · D) de minimis
6. Choose the correct sentence:
A) The lessee must pay the agreed rent to the lessor. · B) The lessor must pay the agreed rent to the lessee. · C) The lessee granted the lease for a term of five years. · D) The lessor took the premises on lease for five years.
7. A lacuna in the prosecution case is:
A) a witness who turns hostile in court · B) a charge framed under the wrong section · C) a document proved without its original · D) a gap that has been left unfilled
8. A concessional rate, as the term was used of the RBI's swap window, is one that is:
A) fixed by statute and not by the regulator · B) reviewed afresh at the close of every quarter · C) easier than the market would ordinarily give · D) available only to borrowers outside the country

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

ETYMOLOGY TRAIL

Everything today is held: from Latin *tenere* come the tenant who holds land, the tenure on which he holds it, the witness who abstains, and the detention that holds a person away from the world. A tenacious litigant who cannot find **cogent** reasons will **construe** the clause his own way, point to a **lacuna** in the statute and press a **vexatious** claim that the court gives short shrift to. **Contumacious** defiance of the resulting order only inculcates him further, and a **perverse** fin his favour would be set aside on appeal. What began as a paper tiger of a petition is ameliorated into something useful only when the court, the real **bulwa** gives its reasons the **imprimatur** of law.

