

ROOT OF THE DAY

pel / puls — *Latin pellere (past participle pulsus) — to drive, to push · “drive, push”*

compel — com- (together, thoroughly) + pel (drive) = to drive someone to act; to force by law or pressure

expel — ex- (out) + pel (drive) = to drive out; to remove a member or a person from a body or a country

impel — im- (into, on) + pel (drive) = to drive on from within; to urge or push someone to do something

repel — re- (back) + pel (drive) = to drive back; to resist an attack or to cause disgust

dispel — dis- (apart, away) + pel (drive) = to drive apart; to make a doubt, fear or rumour disappear

compulsory — com- (thoroughly) + puls (driven) + -ory = that one is driven to do; required by law or rule

POWER WORDS

exonerate v.

“The bank’s own admission that it had filed no fraud complaint went a long way to exonerate the guarantor of any criminal intent.”

Meaning: to declare someone free from blame or wrongdoing

Syn: absolve · **Ant:** incriminate

HOOK: ex- (out of) + onus (burden) → lifting the burden of blame off someone

recant v.

“Diplomats rarely recant a statement made in a UN committee, even when the other side calls it fiction.”

Meaning: to formally withdraw a statement or belief one previously held

Syn: retract · **Ant:** reaffirm

HOOK: re- (back) + cantare (to sing) → to sing it back, unsaying what was said

cursory adj.

“A cursory reading of the RBI resolution misses the fact that the stance change was carried by only four votes to two.”

Meaning: hasty and therefore not thorough or detailed

Syn: perfunctory · **Ant:** meticulous

HOOK: currere (to run) → running over something quickly

pusillanimous adj.

“Critics called the international response to attacks on merchant shipping pusillanimous, a string of statements with no action behind them.”

Meaning: showing a lack of courage or determination; timid

Syn: cowardly · **Ant:** valiant

HOOK: pusillus (very small) + animus (spirit) → small-spirited

impervious adj.

“No central bank is impervious to an oil shock that begins thousands of kilometres away in West Asia.”

Meaning: not affected or influenced by something; unable to be penetrated

Syn: immune · **Ant:** susceptible

HOOK: im- (not) + per (through) + via (way) → no way through

exacerbate v.

“Rising crude prices could exacerbate inflation through second-round effects on transport and food costs.”

Meaning: to make a problem, situation or feeling worse

Syn: aggravate · **Ant:** alleviate

HOOK: ex- (thoroughly) + acerbus (harsh, bitter) → to make more bitter

contrite adj.

“A newspaper that is censured by the Press Council is expected to publish the finding, whether or not it is contrite.”

Meaning: feeling or expressing sincere remorse for a wrong done

Syn: penitent · **Ant:** unrepentant

HOOK: conterere (to grind down) → a heart ground down by guilt

innocuous adj.

“An apparently innocuous letter from a bank manager can, if treated as law, stop a citizen from boarding a flight.”

Meaning: not harmful or offensive; seemingly harmless

Syn: harmless · **Ant:** injurious

HOOK: in- (not) + nocere (to harm) → does no harm

vindictive adj.

“A recovery process that turns vindictive, punishing a defaulter rather than collecting the debt, defeats its own purpose.”

Meaning: having or showing a strong desire for revenge

Syn: vengeful · **Ant:** forgiving

HOOK: vindicta (revenge) → set on getting even

mollify v.

“Four more engines in September did little to mollify an Air Force watching its squadron strength fall.”

Meaning: to calm or soften the anger or anxiety of someone

Syn: placate · **Ant:** provoke

HOOK: mollis (soft) + facere (to make) → to make soft

fortuitous adj.

“It was fortuitous that all 23 Indian seafarers escaped unhurt from a tanker on which crude oil was burning on the water.”

Meaning: happening by chance, often luckily

Syn: accidental · **Ant:** planned

HOOK: fors (chance) → Fortuna, the goddess of chance

vitriolic adj.

“Exchanges in the UN’s legal committee are usually measured, but a statement on terrorism can turn vitriolic within minutes.”

Meaning: filled with bitter criticism or malice

Syn: scathing · **Ant:** conciliatory

HOOK: vitriol = sulphuric acid → words that burn like acid

CONFUSABLE PAIRS — DON’T MIX THESE UP

repel vs **repeal**

repel: to drive back or resist

repeal: to revoke or annul a law officially

TIP: Parliament REPEALS an Act (the extra A is for Act); an army REPELS an attack.

obsolete vs **obsolescent**

obsolete: no longer produced or used; out of date

obsolescent: becoming obsolete; going out of use

TIP: -ESCENT means 'becoming' (as in adolescent) — obsolescent is on its way to being obsolete.

prerequisite vs **perquisite**

prerequisite: something required beforehand as a condition

perquisite: a benefit or privilege that comes with a job (a 'perk')

TIP: PRE-requisite comes BEFORE; a PERquisite is a PERK.

compulsory vs **compulsive**

compulsory: required by law or a rule

compulsive: resulting from an irresistible inner urge

TIP: COMPULSORY comes from a rule outside you; COMPULSIVE comes from an urge inside you.

warrant vs **warranty**

warrant: a document authorising an action, such as an arrest; or a justification

warranty: a written guarantee about the quality of goods

TIP: Police carry a WARRANT; a fridge comes with a WARRANTY — the Y is for 'Yours if it breaks'.

IDIOMS & ONE-WORD SUBSTITUTION

Idioms in context

- **a catch-22 (situation)** — a dilemma from which there is no escape because the only solutions are blocked by the problem itself

One-word substitution

- a person who promises to pay a borrower's debt if the borrower fails → **guarantor**



"The guarantor faced a catch-22: he could repay only by earning abroad, but he could not go abroad until he repaid."

- **a vicious circle** — a sequence in which one problem causes another that makes the first worse
"Late engines delay the jets, and late jets deplete the squadrons further — a vicious circle the IAF wants broken."
- **to throw down the gauntlet** — to issue a challenge, especially a public one
"By moving to 'calibrated tightening', the MPC threw down the gauntlet to inflation rather than waiting for it to fade."
- **back to the drawing board** — to start planning again after an earlier plan has failed
"If the new cheetah site fails to hold its animals, Project Cheetah will be back to the drawing board on its landscape plan."

- a person or company unable to pay debts as they fall due → **insolvent**
- a formal agreement between warring parties to stop fighting → **armistice**
- an official ban on trade or other commercial activity with a particular country → **embargo**
- the practice of passing off another person's work or ideas as one's own → **plagiarism**

WORDS IN THE WILD — FROM TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

- **emboldened** — given the courage or confidence to do something, often something one should not
"If a nationalised bank could obtain an LOC by a letter, the judge reasoned, every private creditor or non-banking finance company would be emboldened to approach the police to stop its debtors from leaving the country." — CLAT Gurukul daily brief (Madras HC look-out circular), 8 Oct 2026
- **admonish** — to warn or reprimand someone firmly
"Under Section 14 of the Act, after giving a hearing, the Council may warn, admonish or censure a newspaper, news agency, editor or journalist, or disapprove of their conduct." — CLAT Gurukul daily brief (Press Council of India), 8 Oct 2026
- **unwarranted** — not justified or authorised; uncalled for
"He rejected the OIC's 'unwarranted reference' to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, asserted India's right to defend its people against cross-border terrorism, and pointed to protests and a crackdown in Rawalakot in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir." — CLAT Gurukul daily brief (India rejects OIC remarks at UN), 8 Oct 2026
- **obsolescence** — the process of becoming outdated and no longer useful
"In September, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, speaking at a HAL handover ceremony in Bengaluru, called for realistic project timelines, warning that delays can create gaps in critical defence requirements, cause cost escalation and raise the risk of technology obsolescence." — CLAT Gurukul daily brief (GE engines for Tejas Mk 1A), 8 Oct 2026

LEGAL & LATIN TERMS EVERY ASPIRANT MUST KNOW

- **ultra vires** — beyond the legal power or authority of the body acting
- **locus standi** — the right or capacity to bring an action or appear before a court
- **prima facie** — at first sight; on the face of it, before closer examination
- **res judicata** — a matter already finally decided by a competent court, which cannot be re-litigated
- **audi alteram partem** — hear the other side; no one should be condemned unheard
- **habeas corpus** — 'you shall have the body'; a writ requiring a detained person to be produced before a court
- **ne exeat regno** — 'let him not leave the kingdom'; an order restraining a person from leaving the jurisdiction
- **in personam** — directed against a particular person, binding only the parties, as distinct from in rem
- **casus belli** — an act or event that provokes or is used to justify war
- **mare liberum** — 'the free sea'; the principle that the high seas are open to the ships of all nations
- **sub judice** — under judicial consideration and therefore not to be publicly discussed or prejudged
- **stare decisis** — to stand by decided cases; the doctrine of binding precedent
- **jus cogens** — a peremptory norm of international law from which no derogation is permitted

RECALL CHECK — WORDS FROM EARLIER

assiduous (learnt 7 days ago) — meaning: _____

PRACTICE DRILL

- 'Dispel' most nearly means:
A) to drive away a doubt or fear · B) to drive back an attack · C) to force someone to act · D) to remove a member from a body
- Choose the best fit: Under Section 14, the Press Council may _____ a newspaper but cannot fine it.
A) exonerate · B) mollify · C) admonish · D) recant
- 'Pusillanimous' most nearly means:
A) bitterly critical · B) lacking courage · C) harmless · D) happening by chance
- Parliament can _____ an Act, but an army can only _____ an attack.
A) repel ... repeal · B) compel ... expel · C) impel ... dispel · D) repeal ... repel
- The maxim 'ne exeat regno' refers to:
A) the doctrine of binding precedent · B) a writ requiring a detainee to be produced · C) an order restraining a person from leaving the jurisdiction · D) the freedom of the high seas
- Choose the best fit: Delays in engine supply raise the risk of technology _____.
A) obsolescence · B) requisite · C) warranty · D) armistice
- A person who promises to pay a borrower's debt if the borrower defaults is a/an:
A) insolvent · B) embargo · C) testator · D) guarantor
- 'Exacerbate' most nearly means:
A) to soften or calm · B) to make worse · C) to declare blameless · D) to withdraw a statement

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

ETYMOLOGY TRAIL

The Latin **pellere**, 'to drive', explains why no one may be **compelled** to stay at home by a mere letter. A bank that could **impel** the police to stop a would leave every creditor **emboldened**, and the Madras High Court acted to **dispel** that fear, refusing to treat an **innocuous**-looking note as law reasoning did not **exonerate** the guarantor of the debt; it simply held that a **cursory** request is no substitute for a statute under Article 21.

