ROOT OF THE DAY

pot / poss — *Latin potis (able, powerful), posse (to be able) and potens, potent- (powerful) · "power, ability"*

potent — Latin potens, potent- (powerful, able), present participle of posse = having power
potentate — Late Latin potentatus (power, dominion), from potens = a ruler who holds power
omnipotent — Latin omnipotens: omnis (all) + potens (powerful) = all-powerful
impotent — Latin impotens: in- (not) + potens (powerful) = powerless
plenipotentiary — Medieval Latin plenipotentiarius: plenus (full) + potentia (power) = an envoy with full powers
possess — Latin possidere: potis (master, able) + sedere (to sit) = to sit as master of a thing

POWER WORDS

potentate *n.*
"The summit brought together oil-rich potentates whose word is law in their own kingdoms."
Meaning: a monarch or ruler, especially an autocratic one; any person who holds great power
Syn: ruler, monarch, sovereign · **Ant:** subject, commoner, underling
HOOK: Late Latin potentatus (dominion), from potens (powerful): not a person who has power, but one who is power

omnipotent *adj.*
"Under the basic structure doctrine of Kesavananda Bharati (1973), Parliament is not omnipotent: even a constitutional amendment can be struck down."
Meaning: having unlimited power; able to do anything
Syn: all-powerful, supreme, almighty · **Ant:** powerless, impotent, limited
HOOK: omnis (all) + potens (powerful); Dicey's sovereign Parliament is omnipotent, India's is not

impotent *adj.*
"Without the power to impose penalties, the regulator was impotent against companies that ignored its notices."
Meaning: unable to take effective action; lacking power or strength
Syn: powerless, ineffective, helpless · **Ant:** potent, powerful, effective
HOOK: in- (not) + potens; Latin impotens also meant 'lacking self-control', hence 'impotent rage', anger that can do nothing

suzerainty *n.*
"At the Simla Conference of 1913-14, Britain proposed that China hold only suzerainty, not sovereignty, over Tibet."
Meaning: the position of a state that controls another state's foreign affairs while allowing it internal self-government
Syn: overlordship, paramountcy, dominion · **Ant:** independence, autonomy, self-rule
HOOK: French suzerain, from sus (above, Latin sursum 'upward'), modelled on souverain (sovereign)

imperious *adj.*
"The judge rebuked the officer's imperious refusal to explain why the petitioner had been detained."
Meaning: assuming power or authority without justification; arrogant and domineering
Syn: overbearing, high-handed, peremptory · **Ant:** humble, deferential, meek
HOOK: Latin imperiosus (commanding), from imperium (command): an imperious man gives orders he has no right to give

overweening *adj.*
"The court warned that the overweening ambition of an investigating agency cannot override an accused person's right to a fair trial."
Meaning: showing excessive confidence or pride; arrogant
Syn: arrogant, presumptuous, excessive · **Ant:** modest, diffident, restrained
HOOK: over + ween (Old English wenan, to think or expect): to overween is to think too highly of oneself

satrap *n.*
"Critics described the party's state chiefs as satraps who answered only to the high command in Delhi."
Meaning: (1) a provincial governor in the ancient Persian empire; (2) a subordinate ruler or local official who behaves like a petty tyrant
Syn: provincial governor, vassal, henchman · **Ant:** overlord, sovereign, emperor
HOOK: Old Persian xšaçapāvan (protector of the realm), via Greek satrapes; the Achaemenid empire was divided into satrapies

despotic *adj.*
"The framers feared that unchecked executive power could turn despotic, so they built in judicial review."
Meaning: of or typical of a ruler who holds absolute power and uses it cruelly or oppressively
Syn: tyrannical, dictatorial, oppressive · **Ant:** democratic, liberal, accountable
HOOK: Greek despotes (master of the household, lord): the despot treats the whole state as his household

autocratic *adj.*
"The autocratic style of the vice-chancellor, who took every decision without consulting the faculty, provoked a strike."
Meaning: taking all decisions oneself without consulting others; relating to rule by one person with absolute power
Syn: dictatorial, authoritarian, absolute · **Ant:** consultative, democratic, participative
HOOK: Greek autokrates (ruling by oneself): autos (self) + kratos (power), the same kratos as in democracy

hubris *n.*
"Napoleon's decision to invade Russia in 1812 is often cited as a classic case of military hubris."
Meaning: excessive pride or self-confidence, especially the kind that leads to a person's downfall
Syn: arrogance, conceit, presumption · **Ant:** humility, modesty, self-doubt
HOOK: Greek hybris (wanton insolence); in Greek tragedy hubris is the pride that the goddess Nemesis punishes

CONFUSABLE PAIRS — DON'T MIX THESE UP

imperious *vs* **imperial**
imperious: arrogant and domineering; giving orders without right
imperial: relating to an empire or an emperor
TIP: An imperial palace belongs to an emperor; an imperious clerk only behaves like one.

suzerainty *vs* **sovereignty**
suzerainty: control of another state's external affairs while it governs itself internally
sovereignty: supreme and complete authority of a state over its territory and affairs
TIP: Sovereignty is full power; suzerainty is power from above that stops at the other state's internal affairs.

autocracy *vs* **aristocracy**
autocracy: rule by one person with absolute power
aristocracy: rule by, or the class of, a privileged hereditary nobility
TIP: Auto- is self, so autocracy is one ruler; aristos is 'best', so aristocracy is rule by the (supposedly) best families.

cognisable *vs* **cognisant**
cognisable: (of an offence) allowing arrest without a warrant; capable of being judicially noticed
cognisant: aware of or having knowledge of something
TIP: Theft is a cognisable offence; a careful judge is cognisant OF the facts. The first is an offence, the second a state of mind.

IDIOMS & ONE-WORD SUBSTITUTION

One-word substitution

- government by the least qualified or least principled citizens → **ka**

NAME: _____ ROLL NO: _____ BATCH: _____

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Idioms in context

- **the power behind the throne** — a person who has no official position but secretly controls the person in authority
  "The minister's private secretary was widely seen as the real power behind the throne."
- **to rule the roost** — to be the person in charge of a group or place
  "In that district the sugar-mill owners have ruled the roost for three decades."
- **to have someone under one's thumb** — to have complete control or influence over someone
  "The chairman kept the entire board under his thumb, so no resolution ever passed without his approval."
- **the lion's share** — the largest part; from Aesop's fable in which the lion takes the whole kill
  "The lion's share of the new budget went to defence and infrastructure."

- a person appointed to rule a state because the monarch is a minor, absent or incapacitated → **regent**
- a military group that rules a country after taking power by force → **junta**
- a person who has great influence over who will be appointed to high office, without being a candidate → **kingmaker**
- a group of three persons who share power or authority → **triumvirate**

WORDS IN THE WILD — FROM TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

- **supremacy** — the state of being superior to all others in authority or power; in EU law, the rule that EU law prevails over conflicting national law
  "Re-joining the EU would require Parliament to pass new primary legislation restoring EU law supremacy — a significant act given the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, the cornerstone of UK constitutional law (there is no written constitution; Parliament can pass any law)." — *CLAT Gurukul daily brief (UK PM Andy Burnham opens the door to full EU re-entry), 1 Oct 2026*
- **agrément** — the formal consent of a receiving State to the person another State proposes to send as head of its diplomatic mission
  "Article 4(2) says the receiving State is not obliged to give reasons for refusing agrément." — *CLAT Gurukul daily brief (India's new Ambassador to Nepal, agrément and the 1950 Treaty), 9 Oct 2026*
- **cognisable** — (of an offence) one for which the police may arrest without a warrant and start an investigation without a magistrate's order
  "Offences in the top tier involving the core clauses are cognisable and non-bailable (Section 132(5)); others are non-cognisable and bailable." — *CLAT Gurukul daily brief (GST Council's 57th meeting on arrest powers and the prosecution threshold), 9 Oct 2026*
- **weaponised** — used as a weapon; turned against others to harm or pressure them, especially in a way not originally intended
  "The deeper point is one CLAT passages return to repeatedly: a protective statute becomes less protective when its process can be weaponised, because every misuse spends a little of the credibility genuine complainants depend on." — *CLAT Gurukul daily brief (Supreme Court safeguards against misuse of POCSO in custody disputes), 25 Sep 2026*

LEGAL & LATIN TERMS EVERY ASPIRANT MUST KNOW

- **imperium** — supreme power of command; in Roman law the authority of a magistrate to command and to punish
- **dominium** — ownership; the right of property over a thing, as distinct from imperium, the power to govern
- **jus imperii** — sovereign acts of a State, immune under restrictive immunity, unlike commercial acts (jus gestionis)
- **imperium in imperio** — 'a government within a government'; an authority claiming independence inside a State
- **patria potestas** — in Roman law, the power of the male head of a family over his children and descendants
- **posse comitatus** — 'the power of the county'; the body of citizens a sheriff could summon to keep the peace or pursue offenders
- **plena potestas** — 'full power'; the authority given to an agent or envoy to bind the principal, the source of 'plenipotentiary'
- **rex non potest peccare** — 'the king can do no wrong'; the old common-law maxim behind the immunity of the Crown
- **princeps legibus solutus est** — 'the emperor is not bound by the laws'; Ulpian, in Justinian's Digest
- **quod principi placuit legis habet vigorem** — 'what pleases the prince has the force of law'; Ulpian, in the Digest

RECALL CHECK — WORDS FROM EARLIER

extort (learnt 7 days ago) — meaning: _____

peremptory (learnt 21 days ago) — meaning: _____

sacrosanct (learnt 45 days ago) — meaning: _____

PRACTICE DRILL

1. Under ____, the princely states ran their own internal affairs, but the paramount power controlled their defence and foreign relations.
A) autocracy · B) suzerainty · C) hubris · D) omnipotence

2. Which word is closest in meaning to 'imperious'?
A) humble · B) imperial · C) hesitant · D) domineering

3. After three election wins in a row, the leader's ____ made him dismiss every warning, and his party lost the next poll badly.
A) hubris · B) suzerainty · C) agrément · D) supremacy

4. A diplomat given full power to negotiate and sign a treaty on behalf of his government is a ____.
A) potentate · B) satrap · C) plenipotentiary · D) regent

5. Unable to stop the floodwaters, the villagers watched in ____ rage as their crops were washed away.
A) impotent · B) omnipotent · C) imperious · D) overweening

6. Before a State announces its new ambassador, it must first obtain the receiving State's ____.
A) supremacy · B) suzerainty · C) imperium · D) agrément

7. In a ____ offence, the police may arrest the accused without a warrant from a magistrate.
A) non-cognisable · B) compoundable · C) cognisable · D) civil

8. The provincial governor ruled like a ____, loyal to the emperor in name but a petty tyrant at home.
A) plenipotentiary · B) satrap · C) kingmaker · D) triumvirate

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

ETYMOLOGY TRAIL

From Latin posse, to be able, the powerful became potent, the ruler a **potentate**, *the all-powerful* **omnipotent** *and the powerless* **impotent**; *an envoy with full power is a plenipotentiary, and to sit as master is to possess. Power from above is* **suzerainty**; *the commanding are* **imperious**, *the self-important* **overwee**
Persia gave the **satrap**, *Greece the* **despotic** *master, the* **autocratic** *self-ruler and the* **hubris** *that Nemesis punishes. In the news: EU law supremacy, a refus*
agrément, a cognisable GST offence and a weaponised statute.

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