



Just the Right Word

The carefully chosen words and the powerful sentences of the Gettysburg Address deeply moved Lincoln’s audience. Even today those words stir audiences and readers. Legend says that Lincoln hastily jotted down this speech on the back of an envelope. Actually, he prepared it carefully. He was speaking officially on a solemn occasion, and what he said suited the occasion. He chose just the right words.

Lincoln already had those words in his vocabulary. They were there for him to choose from. Everyone, not just important people, needs right words for any kind of occasion. In this book you will find new words to learn and several ways to discover and to remember word meanings. You will also see how the new words fit in sentences. As you learn more about words, make it a habit to use words that are appropriate for the occasion and that say precisely what you mean.

Influence

Family, church, school, books, newspapers—these are a few of the things that *influence* our lives. Likewise, our language shows the effects of many influences—some dating back many centuries and some still going on today.

The word *influence* itself illustrates the influence of other languages on English. The word came into English from Old French, but it can be traced back to the ancient Latin language. Take the word *influence* apart and you have a Latin prefix meaning “in, into” and a Latin root word meaning “flow.” *Influence*, then, originally meant “the act of flowing into.” Through the centuries a multitude of foreign words have *flowed into* English. Whole words and word parts—prefixes, root words, and suffixes—have enriched our language.

Spelling and Meaning

The way word parts combine explains the spelling of many English words. Through a process that we call *assimilation*, the spelling of the prefix often adapts to the sound of the first letter of the root. For example, when *sub-* combines with the root *fer* to make the word *suffer*, the *b* becomes an *f*. If you understand this process, you can avoid many common spelling errors. For example, you will know when to use certain double consonants, such as the double *f* in *suffer*.

Prefixes

ob-, “against, toward”
sub-, “under”

Roots

fer, “bear, bring”
pone (pon)/pose (pos), “place, put”

The spelling of each root that is given in parentheses is the original Latin spelling of that root.

Can you explain the double *p* in *oppose* and *suppose* and the double *f* in *offer*?

The meaning of the prefix plus the root does not always tell you the meaning of a word as it is used today. Even when it doesn’t, however, it gives you a valuable clue for discovering and understanding the present meaning.

Complete the prefix-plus-root meaning of these verbs. (In such definitions the root meaning comes before the prefix meaning.)

<i>Verbs</i>	<i>Original basic meanings</i>	<i>Present meanings</i>
oppose	_____ place/put _____ against	resist; work against