

Vocabulary Handbook

Greek and Latin Word Parts

Many words in the English language developed from Greek and Latin words. If you know some common Greek and Latin word parts, you can decode the meanings of other unknown words.

Suppose you read a magazine article that says, "If you see this plant, don't touch it! It's phototoxic and could cause a skin rash." How can you predict what the word *phototoxic* means without looking it up in a dictionary? To decode a word, follow the steps to the right.

Break the word into parts. Try to find the Greek or Latin word parts within the word. In the word *phototoxic*, you can find two word parts: *photo-* and *tox-*.

Look up the word parts in the table below. You will find that *photo-* means "light" and *tox-* means "poisonous."

Analyze the clues to determine a definition. In this example, your word clues are "light" and "poisonous." But there is also a clue in the sentence, "skin rash." You might guess that a phototoxic plant is one that can poison a person's skin when a chemical in the plant reacts with sunlight, and that's just what it means!

WORD PART	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
a-	not, without	abiotic: factor in an ecosystem that is not alive
ab-	away, apart	absorption: movement away from one system and into another
ad-	to, toward	adhesion: attraction that pulls molecules of the same substance toward one another
anti-	against	antibiotic: chemical that acts against bacteria
-ase	enzyme	DNA polymerase: enzyme that builds DNA polymers
bi-	two	binary fission: asexual reproduction in which a cell divides into two cells
bio-	life	bioengineering: process by which life forms are changed using technology
cardio-	of or relating to the heart	cardiac muscle: muscle in the heart
cerebr-	brain	cerebral cortex: part of the brain that controls voluntary functions
chloro-	green	chlorophyll: green pigment in photosynthetic organisms that absorbs light
-cide	kill	insecticide: chemical that kills insects
con-, co-, com-	with, together	codominance: both genes expressed together
cyto-	cell	cytoplasm: jellylike substance within a cell
di-	two	dicot: plant whose seeds have two cotyledons
diplo-	double	diploid: having double genetic information
ecto-	outer, outside	ectotherm: organism that uses the outer environment to regulate body temperature
endo-	inner, inside	endoskeleton: skeleton found inside of the body
-gram	write, record	cladogram: record of proposed evolutionary relationships
hetero-	different	heterozygous: having two different alleles
homo-, homeo-	the same	homozygous: having two of the same alleles
hydro-	water	hydrologic cycle: water cycle