

# Where do your words come from???



Here's a family tree of the English language (the "language of the Angles")



**English has two “parents”: Greek and Anglo-Saxon.**

- **Anglo-Saxon** was the language of the tribes of Northern Europe during the early Middle Ages, and it came from an even older language that produced modern northern European languages like German, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, and others.
- **Ancient Greek** developed from about 1000 BC through the early centuries after Christ. Greek was the language of a great empire, and in fact was still the main language during Jesus' time. That's why all the New Testament books are written in Greek.
- **Latin** was the language of the Roman Empire, which slowly conquered and overtook the Greek world. They borrowed many of the words that the Greeks invented—words about government (like democracy and hierarchy), philosophy (like philosophy and theory), and others.

### **So how did the two parents meet?**

- Latin became the language of the Western world throughout the Middle Ages. It was the language of the Church, for example. But the language changed from place to place in an age before telephones, newspapers, and internet. Frankish people (in what's now France) spoke a Latin that became French. People in Iberia (modern Spain and Portugal) developed Spanish and Portuguese. People close to Rome developed Italian, and further east they developed Romanian when they mixed with people who spoke the language of another group, the Slavs.
- One group of these French-Latin speakers, called the Normans, invaded the land of the tribe known as the Angles: Angle-land, or England, in 1066. After they conquered the land, the languages began to mix. The nobles spoke Norman French, while the locals spoke Anglo-Saxon.
- Over time the mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Norman French became known as English. Even today, most words of one syllable (like “word,” “I” and “we”) come from Anglo-Saxon. Most words of two syllables or more (like “syllable” and “language”) come from Greek and/or Latin through Norman French.

### **So English can be described as an Anglo-Saxon language with a lot of Greek and Latin words.**

English has more words than probably any other language—500,000!

What does this mean for you?

### **If you learn Greek and Latin words, you can learn many other English words that come from them!**

#### **Some examples:**

- School: Latin *schola*, school, from Greek *schole*, leisure (something you did in your free time!)
- Gym: Latin *gymnasium*, a place of exercise, from Greek *gymnazein*, to exercise (and from *gymnos*, naked—because in ancient Greece athletes trained naked. I don't think that would work today.)
- Music: from Latin *musica*, from Greek *musike*, the art of the Muses. In Ancient Greece, the Muses were the goddesses who inspired poets and musicians.)

And there are hundreds and hundreds more!

Prof. Tim Muldoon  
Honors Program, College of Arts and Sciences  
Boston College

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