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of the guards on a basketball team; *also*: the guards themselves (a team with a strong ~)

back-court-man \ˈbæk-kɔrt-mən/ *n* (1954): a guard on a basketball team

back-cross \ˈbæk-kroʊs/ *v* (1904): to cross (a first-generation hybrid) with one of the parental types

backcross *n* (1918): a mating that involves backcrossing; *also*: an individual produced by backcrossing

back-date \ˈbæk-dāt/ *v* (1944): to put a date earlier than the actual one on (~ a memo); *also*: to make retroactive (~ pension rights)

back dive *n* (ca. 1934): a dive from a position facing the diving board

back-door \ˈbæk-dɔr/ *adj* (1805) 1: INDIRECT, DEVIOUS 2: involving or being a play in basketball in which a player moves behind the defense and toward the basket to receive a quick pass (a ~ layup)

back down *v* (1849): to withdraw from a commitment or position

back-drop \ˈbæk-drɒp/ *n* (1913) 1: a painted cloth hung across the rear of a stage 2: BACKGROUND — **backdrop** *v*

back-field \ˈbæk-fild/ *n* (1903): the football players whose positions are behind the line of scrimmage; *also*: the positions themselves

back-fill \ˈbæk-fil/ *v* (1908): to refill (as an excavation) usu. with excavated material ~ *vt*: to backfill an excavation — **backfill** *n*

back-fire \ˈbæk-faɪər/ *n* (1839) 1: a fire started to check an advancing fire by clearing an area 2: a loud noise caused by the improperly timed explosion of fuel mixture in the cylinder of an internal combustion engine

backfire *v* (1886) 1: to make or undergo a backfire 2: to have the reverse of the desired or expected effect (their plans *backfired*)

back-fit \ˈbæk-fit/ *v* (1967): RETROFIT — **backfit** *n*

back-flip \ˈbæk-flɪp/ *n* (1935): a backward somersault esp. in the air

back-flow \ˈbæk-flɔ/ *n* (1878): a flowing back or returning esp. toward a source

back-formation *n* (1889) 1: a word formed by subtraction of a real or supposed affix from an already existing longer word (as *burglar* from *burglar*) 2: the formation of back-formations

back-gam-mon \ˈbæk-gə-mən, -bæk-/ *n* [perh. fr. *back* + ME *gamen*, game game] (ca. 1645): a board game played with dice and counters in which players try to be the first to gather their pieces into one corner and then systematically remove them from the board

back-ground \ˈbæk-(g)raʊnd/ *n*, often *attrib* (1672) 1 a: the scenery or ground behind something b: the part of a painting representing what lies behind objects in the foreground 2: an inconspicuous position 3 a: the conditions that form the setting within which something is experienced b (1): the circumstances or events antecedent to a phenomenon or development (2): information essential to understanding of a problem or situation c: the total of a person's experience, knowledge, and education 4 a: intrusive sound or radiation that interferes with received or recorded electronic signals b: a more or less steady level of noise above which the effect (as radioactivity) being measured by an apparatus (as a Geiger counter) is detected; esp.: a somewhat steady level of radiation in the natural environment (as from cosmic rays) 5: a level of computer processing at which the processor uses time not required for a primary task to work on an additional task — compare FOREGROUND — **on background**: with the understanding that information offered for publication will not be attributed to a specific source (an official speaking *on background*)

syn BACKGROUND, SETTING, ENVIRONMENT, MILIEU, MISE-EN-SCÈNE mean the place, time, and circumstances in which something occurs. BACKGROUND often refers to the circumstances or events that precede a phenomenon or development (the shocking decision was part of the *background* of the riots). SETTING suggests looking at real-life situations in literary or dramatic terms (a militant reformer who was born into an unlikely social *setting*). ENVIRONMENT applies to all the external factors that have a formative influence on one's physical, mental, or moral development (the kind of *environment* that produces juvenile delinquents). MILIEU applies esp. to the physical and social surroundings of a person or group of persons (an intellectual *milieu* conducive to artistic experimentation). MISE-EN-SCÈNE strongly suggests the use of properties to achieve a particular atmosphere or theatrical effect (a gothic thriller with a carefully crafted *mise-en-scène*).

background *v* (1768): to provide with background

back-ground-er \ˈbæk-(g)raʊnd-ər/ *n* (1960): an off-the-record brief for reporters

background music *n* (1928): music to accompany the dialogue or action of a motion picture or radio or television drama

background radiation *n* (1968): the microwave radiation pervading the universe that exhibits a corresponding blackbody temperature of 2.7 K and that is the principal evidence supporting the big bang theory — called also *cosmic background radiation*

back-hand \ˈbæk-hand/ *n* (1657) 1 a: a stroke (as in tennis) made with the back of the hand turned in the direction of movement; *also*: the side on which such strokes are made b: a catch (as in baseball) made to the side of the body opposite the hand being used 2: handwriting whose strokes slant downward from left to right

backhand *adj* (1695): made with a back-hand (a ~ tennis stroke)

backhand or back-hand-ed \ˈhæn-dəd/ *adv* (1889): with a backhand

backhand *v* (ca. 1935): to do, hit, or catch backhand

back-hand-ed \ˈbæk-han-dəd/ *adj* (1800) 1: INDIRECT, DEVIOUS; esp.: SARCASTIC (a ~ compliment) 2: using or made with a backhand — **back-hand-ed-ly** *adv*

back-hand-er \ˈbæk-dər/ *n* (1960) 1 *Brit*: BRIBE 2: a backhand shot

back-hoe \ˈhɒ-/ *n* (1928): an excavating machine having a bucket that is attached to a rigid bar hinged to a boom and that is drawn toward the machine in operation

back-house \ˈhæʊs/ *n* (1836): PRIVY 1a

back-ing \ˈbæk-ɪŋ/ *n* (1793) 1: something forming a back 2 a: SUPPORT, AID b: endorsement esp. of a warrant by a magistrate

back judge *n* (ca. 1966): a football official whose duties include keeping the game's official time and identifying eligible pass receivers



backhand 1a

back-land \ˈbæk-land/ *n* (1681): BACKCOUNTRY, HINTERLAND — *usu.* used in pl.

back-lash \ˈbæk-ləʃ/ *n* (1815) 1 a: a sudden violent backward movement or reaction b: the play between adjacent movable parts (as in a series of gears); *also*: the jar caused by this when the parts are put into action 2: a snarl in that part of a fishing line wound on the reel 3: a strong adverse reaction (as to a recent political or social development) — **back-lash-er** *n*

back-light \ˈbæk-lɪt/ *n* (ca. 1846): illumination from behind; *also*: the source of such illumination — **backlight** *v*

back-list \ˈbæk-lɪst/ *n* (1964): a list of books kept in print as distinguished from books newly published

back-log \ˈbɒg, -lɒg/ *n* (1684) 1: a large log at the back of a hearth fire 2: an accumulation of tasks unperformed or materials not processed (a ~ of court cases)

backlog *v* (1963): ACCUMULATE

back matter *n* (1947): matter following the main text of a book

back mutation *n* (1939): mutation of a previously mutated gene to its former condition

back of prep (1694): BEHIND (out *back of* the barn)

back of beyond (1816): a remote place

back off *v* (1850): BACK DOWN

back-office \ˈbæk-ɒfɪs, -'ɒ-fas/ *adj* (1953): of or relating to the inner workings of a business or institution: INTERNAL (~ operations)

back-order *v* (1950): to assign to the status of back order

back order *n* (ca. 1929): a business order yet to be fulfilled because stock is unavailable

back out *v* (1807): to withdraw esp. from a commitment or contest

back-pack \ˈbæk-pæk/ *n* (1914) 1 a: a load carried on the back b: a camping pack (as of canvas or nylon) supported by a usu. aluminum frame and carried on the back c: KNAPSACK 2: a piece of equipment designed for use while being carried on the back

backpack *v* (1927): to carry (food or equipment) on the back esp. in hiking ~ *vi*: to hike with a backpack — **back-pack-er** *n*

back-pedal \ˈbæk-pe-dəl/ *v* (1901): to retreat or move backward

back-rest \ˈbæk-rest/ *n* (1859): a rest for the back

back-room \ˈbæk-rum, -rʊm/ *adj* (1940): made or operating in an inconspicuous way: BEHIND-THE-SCENES (~ deals) (a ~ politician)

back room *n* (1592) 1: a room situated in the rear 2: the meeting place of a directing group that exercises its authority in an inconspicuous and indirect way

back-saw \ˈbæk-sɔ/ *n* (ca. 1876): a saw with a metal rib along its back

back-scat-ter \ˈbæk-skɑ-tər/ *also* **back-scat-ter-ing** \-tə-rɪŋ/ *n* (1940): the scattering of radiation or particles in a direction opposite to that of the incident radiation due to reflection from particles of the medium traversed; *also*: the radiation or particles so reversed in direction — **backscatter** *v*

back-scratch-ing \ˈbæk-skra-tʃɪŋ/ *n* (1904): the reciprocal exchange of favors, services, assistance, or praise

back-seat \ˈbæk-si:t/ *n* (1780) 1: a seat in the back (as of an automobile) 2: an inferior position (won't take a ~ to anyone)

back-set \ˈbæk-set/ *n* (1721): SETBACK

back-side \ˈbæk-saɪd/ *n* (ca. 1500): BUTTOCKS — often used in pl.

back-slap \ˈbæk-sləp/ *v* (1777): to display excessive or effusive goodwill for ~ *vi*: to display excessive cordiality or goodwill — **backslap** *n* — **back-slap-per** *n*

back-slash \ˈbæk-sləʃ/ *n* (1982): a mark \ used esp. in computer programming

back-slide \ˈbæk-slaɪd/ *v* -slid \ˈsli:d/ -slid *or* -slid-den \ˈsli-dən/ -slid-ing \ˈsli-dɪŋ/ (1552) 1: to lapse morally or in the practice of religion 2: to revert to a worse condition: RETROGRESS — **backslide** *n* — **back-slid-er** \ˈbæk-sli-dər/ *n*

back-space \ˈbæk-spās/ *v* (1911): to move back a space in a text with the press of a key

backspace *n* (1983): an instance of backspacing; *also*: the key pressed in backspacing

back-spin \ˈbæk-spɪn/ *n* (ca. 1909): a backward rotary motion of a ball

back-splash \ˈbæk-spləʃ/ *n* (1947): a vertical surface (as of tiles) designed to protect the wall behind a stove or countertop

back-stab-bing \ˈbæk-stəb-ɪŋ/ *n* (1946): betrayal (as by a verbal attack against one not present) esp. by a false friend — **back-stab** \ˈbæk-stəb/ *v* — **back-stab-ber** \ˈbæk-stə-bər/ *n*

back-stage \ˈbæk-stəʃ/ *adj* (1916) 1: of, relating to, or occurring in the area behind the stage and esp. in the dressing rooms 2: of or relating to the private lives of theater people 3: of or relating to the inner working or operation (as of an organization)

back-stage \ˈbæk-stəʃ/ *adv* (1922) 1: in or to a backstage area 2: in private: SECRETLY

back-stairs \ˈbæk-staɪəz/ *adj* (1663) 1: SECRET, FURTIVE (~ political deals) 2: SORDID, SCANDALOUS (~ gossip)

back-stay \ˈbæk-stə/ *n* (1626) 1: a stay extending aft from a masthead 2: a strengthening or supporting device at the back (as of a carriage or a shoe)

back-stitch \ˈbæk-stɪtʃ/ *n* (1611): a stitch sewn one stitch length backward on the front side and two stitch lengths forward on the reverse side to form a solid line of stitching on both sides — **backstitch** *v*

back-stop \ˈbæk-stɒp/ *n* (1851) 1: something at the back serving as a stop: as a: a screen or fence for keeping a ball from leaving the field of play b: a stop (as a pawl) that prevents a backward movement (as of a wheel) 2: a player (as the catcher) positioned behind the batter

backstop *v* (1941) 1: SUPPORT, BOLSTER 2: to serve as a backstop to 3: to play the position of goalkeeper for (~ a hockey team)

back-story \ˈbæk-stɔri/ *n* (1984): a story that tells what led up to the main story or plot (as of a film)

back-street \ˈbæk-strɛt/ *n*, often *attrib* (15c): a street away from the main thoroughfares

back-stretch \ˈbæk-stretʃ/ *n* (1839): the side opposite the home-stretch on a racecourse

back-stroke \ˈbæk-strɒk/ *n* (1879): a swimming stroke executed on the back and usu. consisting of alternating circular arm pulls and a flutter kick — **back-strok-er** \ˈbæk-strɒk-ər/ *n*

back-swept \ˈbæk-swept/ *adj* (ca. 1918): swept or slanting backward

back-swim-mer \ˈbæk-swi-mər/ *n* (1862): an aquatic bug (family Notonectidae) that swims on its back