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■ the mechanism that makes a machine or instrument work: *a piano with an escapement action.*
 — PHRASES **go into action** start work or activity. **in action** engaged in a certain activity; in operation. **out of action** temporarily unable to engage in a certain activity; not working: *a heart attack put him out of action | the ship was out of action for 16 days.*
put into action put into effect; carry out.
 — ORIGIN late Middle English: via Old French from Latin *actio* (n-), from *agere* 'do, act.'

action-able /'akʃənəbəl/ ► **adj.** Law **1** giving sufficient reason to take legal action: *slandorous remarks are actionable.*
2 able to be done or acted on; having practical value: *insightful and actionable information on the effect advertising is having on your brand.*

action com-mit-tee (also **action group**) ► **n.** a body formed to campaign politically, typically on a particular issue.

action figure ► **n.** a doll representing a person or fictional character known for vigorous action, such as a soldier or superhero. The figure typically is poseable, with jointed limbs.

action painting ► **n.** a technique and style of abstract painting in which paint is randomly splashed, thrown, or poured on the canvas. It was made famous by Jackson Pollock, and formed part of the more general movement of abstract expressionism.

action point ► **n.** a specific proposal for action to be taken, typically one arising from a discussion or meeting.

action po-ten-tial ► **n.** Physiology the change in electrical potential associated with the passage of an impulse along the membrane of a muscle cell or nerve cell.

Ac-ti-um, Bat-tle of /'aktēəm, 'akʃhēm/ a naval battle which took place in 31 BC off the promontory of Actium in western Greece, in the course of which Octavian defeated Mark Antony.

ac-ti-vate /'aktəvāt/ ► **v.** [with obj.] make (something) active or operative: *fumes from cooking are enough to activate the alarm.* ■ convert (a substance, molecule, etc.) into a reactive form: (as adj. **activated**) *activated chlorine.*

— DERIVATIVES **ac-ti-va-tion** /'aktəvāʃən/ **n.**, **ac-ti-va-tor** /-vātər/ **n.**

ac-ti-vat-ed car-bon (also **activated charcoal**) ► **n.** charcoal that has been heated or otherwise treated to increase its adsorptive power.

ac-ti-vat-ed sludge ► **n.** aerated sewage containing aerobic microorganisms that help to break it down.

ac-ti-va-tion a-nal-y-sis /'aktəvāʃən/ ► **n.** Chemistry a technique of analysis in which atoms of a particular element in a sample are made radioactive, typically by irradiation with neutrons, and their concentration is then determined radiologically.

ac-ti-va-tion en-er-gy ► **n.** Chemistry the minimum quantity of energy that the reacting species must possess in order to undergo a specified reaction.

ac-tive /'aktiv/ ► **adj.** **1** (of a person) engaging or ready to engage in physically energetic pursuits: *I needed to change my lifestyle and become more active.* ■ moving or tending to move about vigorously or frequently: *active fish need a larger tank.* ■ characterized by energetic activity: *they enjoyed an active social life.* ■ (of a person's mind or imagination) alert and lively.

2 doing things for an organization, cause, or campaign, rather than simply giving it one's support: *she was an active member of the church | he had never been very active in the affairs of the institute | he enjoyed the active support of the government.* ■ (of a person) participating or engaged in a particular sphere or activity: *a politically active student body.* ■ [predic.] (of a person or animal) pursuing their usual occupation or activity, typically at a particular place or time: *tigers are active mainly at night.*

3 working; operative: *the old mill was active until 1960.* ■ (of a bank account) in continuous use. ■ (of an electrical circuit) capable of modifying its state or characteristics automatically in response to input or feedback. ■ (of a volcano) currently erupting, or that has erupted within historical times. Often contrasted with **DORMANT** or **EXTINCT**. ■ (of a disease) in which the symptoms are manifest; not in remission or latent: *active colitis.* ■ having a chemical or biological effect on something: *350 active ingredients have been banned from pesticides.*

4 Grammar relating to or denoting the voice that attributes the action of a verb to the person or thing from which it logically proceeds (e.g., of the verbs in *guns kill* and *we saw him*). The opposite of **PASSIVE**.

► **n.** Grammar an active form of a verb. ■ (**the active**) the active voice.

— DERIVATIVES **ac-tive-ly** **adv.**, **ac-tive-ness** **n.**

— ORIGIN Middle English (in the sense 'preferring action to contemplation'): from Latin *activus*, from *act-* 'done,' from the verb *agere*.

ac-tive bar-ri-er ► **n.** a barrier that allows passage of defined agents while preventing or impeding others, in particular: ■ a security barrier that responds to attempted entries with sensors or personnel. ■ a physical or chemical barrier that intercepts contaminants, debris, or other unwanted substances.

ac-tive du-ty ► **n.** full-time service in the police or armed forces. ■ the playing of a direct role in the operational work of the police or armed forces as opposed to doing administrative work.

ac-tive im-mu-ni-ty ► **n.** Physiology the immunity that results from the production of antibodies by the immune system in response to the presence of an antigen. Compare with **PASSIVE IMMUNITY**.

ac-tive lay-er ► **n.** Geography the seasonally thawed surface layer above permafrost.

ac-tive list ► **n.** a list of the officers in an armed service who are liable to be called on for duty.

ac-tive ma-trix ► **n.** Electronics a display system in which each pixel is individually controlled.

ac-tive serv-ice ► **n.** direct participation in warfare as a member of the armed forces.

ac-tive site ► **n.** Biochemistry a region on an enzyme that binds to a protein or other substance during a reaction.

ac-tive trans-port ► **n.** Biology the movement of ions or molecules across a cell membrane into a region of higher concentration, assisted by enzymes and requiring energy.

ac-tive-wear /'aktiv,we(ə)r/ ► **n.** clothing designed to be worn for sports, exercise, and outdoor activities.

ac-tiv-ism /'aktəvɪzəm/ ► **n.** the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.

— DERIVATIVES **ac-tiv-ist** **n.** & **adj.**

ac-tiv-i-ty /'aktivɪtē/ ► **n.** (pl. **activities**) **1** the condition in which things are happening or being done: *there has been a sustained level of activity in the economy | 16, they say, is too young for sexual activity.* ■ busy or vigorous action or movement: *the room was a hive of activity.*

2 (usu. **activities**) a thing that a person or group does or has done: *the firm's marketing activities.* ■ a recreational pursuit or pastime: *a range of sports activities.* ■ (**activities**) actions taken by a group in order to achieve their aims: *the police were investigating anarchist activities.*

3 the degree to which something displays its characteristic property or behavior: *abnormal liver enzyme activities.* ■ Chemistry a thermodynamic quantity representing the effective concentration of a particular component in a solution or other system, equal to its concentration multiplied by an **activity coefficient**.

— ORIGIN late Middle English: from French *activité* or late Latin *activitas*, from Latin *act-* 'done,' from the verb *agere*.

act of con-tri-tion ► **n.** (in the Roman Catholic Church) a penitential prayer. ■ something done to make amends for an offense.

ac-to-my-o-sin /'aktəmiəsɪn/ ► **n.** Biochemistry a complex of actin and myosin of which the contractile protein filaments of muscle tissue are composed.

— ORIGIN 1940s: from **ACTIN** + **MYOSIN**.

ac-tor /'aktər/ ► **n.** a person whose profession is acting on the stage, in movies, or on television. ■ a person who behaves in a way that is not genuine: *in war one must be a good actor.* ■ a participant in an action or process: *employers are key actors within industrial relations.*

— ORIGIN late Middle English (originally denoting an agent or administrator): from Latin, 'doer, actor,' from *agere* 'do, act.' The theater sense dates from the 16th cent.

ac-tor-ly /'aktərlē/ ► **adj.** characteristic of an actor or actress: *he seems to lack the actorly range that the role requires.* ■ affected or excessively dramatic: *she eschews the actorly flourishes of her co-star.*

Actors' Stu-dio an acting workshop in New York City, founded in 1947 by Elia Kazan and others, and a leading center of method acting.

ac-tress /'aktɪs/ ► **n.** a female actor.

ac-tress-y /'aktɪsɪ/ ► **adj.** characteristic of an actress; stereotypically being self-consciously theatrical or emotionally volatile: *her actressy manner was an irritant to the others.*

Acts /'akts/ (also **Acts of the Apostles**) a New Testament book immediately following the Gospels and relating the history of the early Church.

ac-tu-al /'akʃhəʊəl/ ► **adj.** **1** existing in fact; typically as contrasted with what was intended,

expected, or believed: *the estimate was much less than the actual cost | those were his actual words.*

■ used to emphasize the important aspect of something: *the book could be condensed into half the space, but what of the actual content?*

2 existing now; current: *using actual income to measure expected income.*

— PHRASES **in actual fact** used to emphasize a comment, typically one that modifies or contradicts a previous statement: *people talk as if he were a monster—in actual fact he was a very kind guy.*

— ORIGIN Middle English: from Old French *actuel* 'active, practical,' from late Latin *actualis*, from *actus* (see **ACT**).

ac-tu-al-i-ty /'akʃhəʊəli'ti/ ► **n.** (pl. **actualities**) actual existence, typically as contrasted with what was intended, expected, or believed: *the building looked as impressive in actuality as it did in magazines | a mission was sent to investigate the actuality of the situation.* ■ (**actualities**) existing conditions or facts: *the grim actualities of prison life.*

— ORIGIN late Middle English (in the sense 'activeness'): from Old French *actualite* or medieval Latin *actualitas*, from *actualis* 'active, practical,' from *actus* (see **ACT**).

ac-tu-al-ize /'akʃhəʊəli'z/ ► **v.** [with obj.] make a reality of: *he had actualized his dream and achieved the world record.*

— DERIVATIVES **ac-tu-al-i-za-tion** /'akʃhəʊəli'zəʃən/ **n.**

ac-tu-al-ly /'akʃhəʊəli/ ► **adv.** **1** as the truth or facts of a situation; really: *we must pay attention to what young people are actually doing | the time actually worked on a job.*

2 [as sentence adverb] used to emphasize that something someone has said or done is surprising: *he actually expected me to be pleased about it!* ■ used when expressing an opinion, typically one that is not expected: *"Actually," she said icily, "I don't care who you go out with."* ■ used when expressing a contradictory opinion or correcting someone: *"Tom seems to be happy." "He isn't, actually, not any more."* ■ used to introduce a new topic or to add information to a previous statement: *he had a thick Brooklyn accent—he sounded like my grandfather actually.*

ac-tu-ar-y /'akʃhəʊ,erē/ ► **n.** (pl. **actuaries**) a person who compiles and analyzes statistics and uses them to calculate insurance risks and premiums.

— DERIVATIVES **ac-tu-ar-i-al** /'akʃhəʊ(ə)riəl/ **adj.**, **ac-tu-ar-i-al-ly** **adv.**

— ORIGIN mid 16th cent. (originally denoting a clerk or registrar of a court): from Latin *actuarius* 'bookkeeper,' from *actus* (see **ACT**). The current sense dates from the mid 19th cent.

ac-tu-ate /'akʃhəʊ,āt/ ► **v.** **1** [with obj.] cause (a machine or device) to operate: *the pendulum actuates an electrical switch.*

2 (usu. **be actuated**) cause (someone) to act in a particular way; motivate: *the defendants were actuated by malice.*

— DERIVATIVES **ac-tu-a-tion** /'akʃhəʊ'əʃən/ **n.**, **ac-tu-a-tor** /-tər/ **n.**

— ORIGIN late 16th cent.: from medieval Latin *actuatus* 'carried out, caused to operate,' from the verb *actuare*, from Latin *actus* (see **ACT**). The original sense was 'carry out in practice,' later 'stir into activity, enliven'; sense **1** dates from the mid 17th cent.

ac-tus re-us /'aktəs'reəs, 'ræəs/ ► **n.** law action or conduct that is a constituent element of a crime, as opposed to the mental state of the accused. Compare with **MENS REA**.

— ORIGIN early 20th cent.: Latin, literally 'guilty act.'

a-cu-i-ty /'əkyoʊi'ti/ ► **n.** sharpness or keenness of thought, vision, or hearing: *intellectual acuity | visual acuity.*

— ORIGIN late Middle English: from Old French *acuite* or medieval Latin *acuitas*, from Latin *acuere* 'sharpen' (see **ACUTE**).

a-cu-le-ate /'əkyoʊlət, -āt/ ► **adj.** **1** Entomology (of an insect) having a sting.

2 Botany sharply pointed; prickly.

► **n.** Entomology a stinging insect of a group that includes the bees, wasps, and ants. ● Section Aculeata, suborder Apocrita, order Hymenoptera.

— ORIGIN mid 17th cent.: from Latin *aculeatus*, from *aculeus* 'a sting,' diminutive of *acus* 'needle.'

a-cu-men /'əkyoʊmən, 'akya-/ ► **n.** the ability to make good judgments and quick decisions, typically in a particular domain: *business acumen.*

— ORIGIN late 16th cent.: from Latin, 'sharpness, point,' from *acuere* 'sharpen' (see **ACUTE**).

a-cu-mi-nate /'əkyoʊmənɪt, -nāt/ ► **adj.** Biology (of a plant or animal structure, e.g., a leaf) tapering to a point.

— ORIGIN late 16th cent.: from late Latin *acuminatus* 'pointed,' from *acuminare* 'sharpen to a point,' from *acuere* 'sharpen' (see **ACUTE**).