

*The*  
AMERICAN  
HERITAGE®  
dictionary  
*of the*  
English  
Language

FIFTH  
EDITION

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt  
BOSTON NEW YORK

Words are included in this dictionary on the basis of their usage. Words that are known to have current trademark registrations are shown with an initial capital and are also identified as trademarks. No investigation has been made of common-law trademark rights in any word, because such investigation is impracticable. The inclusion of any word in this dictionary is not, however, an expression of the publisher's opinion as to whether or not it is subject to proprietary rights. Indeed, no definition in this dictionary is to be regarded as affecting the validity of any trademark.

American Heritage and the eagle logo are registered trademarks of American Heritage Inc. Their use is pursuant to a license agreement with American Heritage Inc.

Copyright © 2011 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.  
All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without the prior written permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt unless such copying is expressly permitted by

federal copyright law. Address inquiries to:  
Reference Permissions, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,  
222 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 02116.

Visit our website at [www.ahdictionary.com](http://www.ahdictionary.com)

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

The American Heritage dictionary of the English language. -- 5th ed.

p. cm.

Previous ed.: 2000.

ISBN 978-0-547-04101-8

1. English language--Dictionaries.

PE1628.A623 2011

423--dc22

2011004777

*Manufactured in the United States of America*

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10-QGV-18 17 16 15 14

(-sûr'di-tē, -zûr't-), **ab-surd/ness** *n.* —**ab-surd/ly** *adv.*

**ab-surd-ism** (ab-sûr'diz-əm, -zûr't-) *n.* 1. A philosophy, often translated into art forms, holding that humans exist in a meaningless, irrational universe and that any search for order by them will bring them into direct conflict with this universe: "True absurdism is not less but more real than reality" (John Simon). 2. An act or instance of the ridiculous: "This strained conceit never quite locates screen equivalents for the stage absurdisms" (Village Voice). —**ab-surd/ist** *adj. & n.*

**A-bu-Bakr** (ä'bûb-bāk'r) also **A-bu Bekr** (ä'bûb bēk'r) 573?–634. First caliph of the Muslim empire (632–634). He was one of the earliest converts to Islam and ascended to power after the death of his son-in-law Muhammad, establishing Islam as a political and military force throughout Arabia.

**a-bub-ble** (ə-bûb'əl) *adj.* 1. Forming or giving off bubbles. 2. Very active or excited.

**A-bu Dha-bi** (ä'bûd dā'bè) A sheikhdom and city of eastern Arabia on the Persian Gulf. The city is the capital of the United Arab Emirates. With enormous oil revenues, the sheikhdom has one of the highest per capita incomes in the world.

**a-build-ing** (ə-bil'ding) *adj.* In the process of being built or of building: "He sees motels and restaurants abuilding" (Wall Street Journal).

**A-bu-ja** (ä'bûj'ä) The capital of Nigeria, in the central part of the country. Laid out in the 1970s according to a comprehensive plan, Abuja replaced Lagos as the country's capital in 1991.

**a-bu-li-a** also **a-bou-li-a** (ə-bûl'ē-ə, -byûl'ē-) *n.* Loss or impairment of the ability to make decisions or act independently. [New Latin < Greek *aboulia*, indecision: *a-*, without; see *A-* + *boulē*, will; see *g'elā* in App. I.] —**a-bu/lic** (-lik) *adj.*

**a-bun-dance** (ə-bûn'dəns) *n.* 1a. A great or plentiful amount: *an abundance of rain*. b. The condition of being in rich supply: *bananas growing in abundance*. 2a. Degree of plentifulness: "Species of low abundance are ignored in the calculation of predominance" (William M. Lewis). b. Chemistry The amount of an isotope of an element that exists in nature, usually expressed as a percentage of the total amount of all isotopes of the element. 3. Affluence; prosperity: *living in abundance*.

**a-bun-dant** (ə-bûn'dənt) *adj.* 1. Occurring in abundance: *abundant crops*. See Synonyms at *plentiful*. 2. Having an abundance of something: *abounding: a region abundant in wildlife*. [Middle English *abundant* < Old French *abondant* < Latin *abundāns*, *abundant-*, present participle of *abundāre*, to overflow; see *ABOUND*.] —**a-bun/dant-ly** *adv.*

**A-bu Qir** also **A-bu-kir** (ä'bûd-kir', äb'û-) A village of northern Egypt in the Nile River delta on the Bay of Abu Qir. Adam. Horatio Nelson's victory over a French fleet off Abu Qir in 1798 restored British prestige in the Mediterranean and ended French hopes of establishing a stronghold in the Middle East.

**a-buse** (ə-byûz'z) *tr.v.* **a-bused**, **a-bus-ing**, **a-bus-es** 1. To use improperly or excessively; misuse: *abuse alcohol*; *abuse a privilege*. 2. To hurt or injure by maltreatment; ill-use: *animals that were abused by a negligent owner*. 3. To force sexual activity on; rape or molest. 4. To assail with insulting or hurtful words; revile. 5. Obsolete To deceive or trick. **♦ n.** (ə-byûz'z) 1a. Improper or excessive use; misuse: *abuse of authority*; *drug abuse*. b. Rough treatment or use: *shoes that have taken a lot of abuse*. 2a. Physical maltreatment or violence: *spousal abuse*. b. Sexual abuse. c. Insulting or hurtful language, especially when used to threaten or demoralize: *subjected her subordinates to verbal abuse*. 3. An unjust or wrongful practice: *a government that commits abuses against its citizens*. —**idiom**: *abuse oneself* To masturbate. [Middle English *abusen* < Old French *abuser* < *abus*, improper use < Latin *abŭsus*, past participle of *abŭti*, to misuse: *ab-*, away; see *AB-* + *ŭti*, to use.] —**a-bus'er** *n.*

♦ **SYNONYMS** *abuse, misuse, mistreat, ill-treat, maltreat* These verbs mean to treat wrongfully or harmfully. *Abuse* applies to injurious or improper treatment: "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us" (Aldo Leopold). *Misuse* stresses incorrect or unknowledgeable handling: "How often misused words generate misleading thoughts" (Herbert Spencer). *Mistreat, ill-treat, and maltreat* all share the sense of inflicting injury, often intentionally: "I had seen many more patients die from being mistreated for consumption than from consumption itself" (Earl of Lytton). "Experienced people . . . become suspicious of those who by their own account are invariably ill-treated by the world" (Bertrand Russell). "[The professor was charged with] underpaying, neglecting, or otherwise mistreating his assistants" (David Rains Wallace).

**A-bu Sim-bel** (ä'bûd sim'bəl, -bəl) A village of southern Egypt on the Nile River. It is the site of massive rock temples dating from c. 1250 BC that were moved to higher ground (1964–1968) to avoid flooding from the Aswan High Dam.

**a-bu-sive** (ə-byûd'siv, -ziv) *adj.* 1. Characterized by improper or wrongful use: *abusive utilization of public funds*. 2. Using or containing insulting or hurtful language: *finally reprimanded the abusive colleague*. 3. Causing physical injury to another: *abusive punishment*. 4. Relating to or practicing sexual abuse. —**a-bu/sive-ly** *adv.* —**a-bu/sive-ness** *n.*

**a-but** (ə-bût') *v.* **a-but-ted**, **a-but-ting**, **a-but-s** —*intr.* To touch or end at one end or side; lie adjacent. —*tr.* 1. To border upon or end at; be next to. 2. To support as an abutment. [Middle English *abutten* < Old French *abouter*, to border on (*a-*, to < Latin *ad-*; see *AD-* + *bouter*, to strike; see *bhau-* in App. I) and < Old French *abuter*, to end at (< *but*, end; see *BUTT*).] —**a-but/ter** *n.*

**a-bu-ti-lon** (ə-byûd'i-lŏn') *n.* See *flowering maple*. [New Latin *Abutilon*, genus name < Medieval Latin *abutilon*, a kind of plant used to treat wounds < medieval scientific Arabic *abūṭilūn*, folk-etymological alteration of earlier *ʾibūṭilūn*, *ʾawbūṭilūn* (taken as *abū*, father, source + Andalusian Arabic *ṭaylūn*, toad), ultimately < misreading of Syriac

*ʾarqūṭūn*, *ʾarqūṭūn*, partly < Greek *arkion*, burdock (probably < *arkein*, to suffice, endure < its tenacious burs) and partly < Greek *arkion*, the plant *Inula candida* (burdock and *Inula candida* often being treated together in medieval botanical works).]

**a-but-ment** (ə-bût'mənt) *n.* 1. The act or process of abutting. 2a. Something that abuts. b. The point of contact of two abutting objects or parts. 3a. The part of a structure that bears the weight or pressure of an arch. b. A structure that supports the end of a bridge. c. A structure that anchors the cables of a suspension bridge.

**a-buzz** (ə-büz') *adj.* Filled with or as if with a buzzing sound: *a field abuzz with snowmobiles*; *a room abuzz with talk*.

**ab-volt** (äb'vôlt') *n.* The centimeter-gram-second electromagnetic unit of potential difference, equal to one hundred-millionth of a volt.

**A-by-dos** (ə-bi'dôs) 1. An ancient town of Asia Minor on the Hellespont in modern-day Turkey. It is the legendary home of Leander, who swam nightly across the strait to his lover Hero. 2. An ancient city of southern Egypt on the Nile River northwest of Thebes. One of the oldest Egyptian cities, it was a religious center for the worship of Osiris and a burial site for the kings of the earliest dynasties.

**a-bysm** (äb'biz'm) *n.* An abyss. [Middle English *abime* < Old French *abysme* < Vulgar Latin *abissimus*, alteration of Late Latin *abyssus*; see *ABYSS*.]

**a-bys-mal** (ə-biz'məl) *adj.* 1. Resembling an abyss in depth; unfathomable. 2. Very profound; limitless: *abysmal misery*. 3. Very bad: *an abysmal performance*. —**a-bys/mal-ly** *adv.*

**abyss** (ə-bis') *n.* 1. An immeasurably deep chasm, depth, or void: "lost in the vast abysses of space and time" (Loren Eiseley). 2a. In the book of Genesis, the primeval Chaos out of which earth and sky were formed. b. The abode of evil spirits; hell. [Middle English *abissus* < Late Latin *abyssus* < Greek *abussos*, bottomless: *a-*, without; see *A-* + *bussos*, bottom.]

**a-bys-sal** (ə-bis'səl) *adj.* 1. Abysmal; unfathomable. 2. Of or relating to the great depths of the oceans. 3. Of or relating to the region of the ocean bottom between the bathyal and hadal zones, from depths of approximately 2,000 to 6,000 meters (6,500 to 20,000 feet).

**Ab-ys-sin-i-a** (äb'i-sin'ē-ə) See *Ethiopia*.

**Ab-ys-sin-i-an** (äb'i-sin'ē-ən) *adj.* Of or relating to Abyssinia. ♦ *n.* 1. A native or inhabitant of Abyssinia. 2. A domestic cat of a slender breed developed in Britain, possibly from cats imported from northeast Africa, having a short coat, often golden brown, with hairs that have bands of lighter and darker color.

**a-bys-so-pe-lag-ic** (ə-bis'sə-pə-lāj'ik) *adj.* Relating to or inhabiting the layer of the water column of the open ocean that lies between the bathypelagic and hadopelagic layers at depths of about 4,000 to 6,000 meters (13,120 to 19,680 feet). [*ABYSS*(AL) + *PELAGIC*.]

**Ab-zug** (äb'zöög', -züg'), **Bella** 1920–1998. American politician who was a US representative from New York State (1971–1976) known for her strong views against the Vietnam War and in support of feminism.

**Ac<sup>1</sup>** The symbol for actinium.

**Ac<sup>2</sup>** *abbr.* Bible Acts of the Apostles

**AC** *abbr.* 1. adult contemporary (radio format) 2. or **a/c** air conditioning 3. air-cool 4. alternating current 5. area code

**ac.** *abbr.* acre

**a.c.** *abbr.* Latin ante cibum (before meals)

**a/c** *abbr.* account current

**ac-** *pref.* Variant of *ad-* (sense 1).

**-ac** *suff.* Used to form adjectives from nouns: *ammoniac*. [New Latin *-acus* < Greek *-akos*.]

**a-ca-cia** (ə-kä'shə) *n.* 1. Any of various often spiny trees or shrubs of the genus *Acacia* in the pea family, having alternate, bipinnately compound leaves or leaves represented by flattened leafstalks and heads or spikes of small flowers. 2. Any of several other plants in the pea family, especially of the genus *Robinia*. 3. See *gum arabic*. [Middle English < Latin < Greek *akakia*.]

**ac-a-deme** (äk'a-dēm') *n.* 1a. The academic environment, community, or world. b. Academic life. 2. A place in which instruction is given to students. 3. A scholar, especially a pedant. [< Latin *Acadēmia*, the Academy; see *ACADEMY*.]

**ac-a-de-mi-a** (äk'a-dēm'ē-ə, -dä't-) *n.* The academic community; academe. [New Latin *acadēmia* < Latin, the Academy; see *ACADEMY*.]

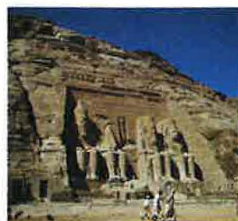
**ac-a-dem-ic** (äk'a-dēm'ik) *adj.* 1a. Of or relating to institutionalized education and scholarship, especially at a college or university. b. Of or relating to studies that rely on reading and involve abstract thought rather than being primarily practical or technical. c. Relating to scholarly performance: *a student's academic average*. 2. **Academic** Of or relating to the conservative style of art promoted by an official academy, especially the Académie des Beaux Arts in France in the nineteenth century. 3. Having little practical use or value, as by being overly detailed, unengaging, or theoretical: *dismissed the article as a dry, academic exercise*. 4. Having no important consequence or relevancy: *The debate about who is to blame has become academic because the business has left town*. ♦ *n.* 1. A faculty member or scholar at an institution of higher learning, such as a university. 2. One who has an academic viewpoint or a scholarly background. —**ac'a-dem/i-cal-ly** *adv.*

**academic freedom** *n.* Liberty to teach, pursue, and discuss knowledge without restriction or interference, as by school or public officials.

**ac-a-de-mi-cian** (äk'a-də-mish'ən, ä-käd'ə-) *n.* 1. An academic. 2. A member of an art, literary, or scientific academy or society.

**ac-a-dem-i-cism** (äk'a-dēm'i-siz'm) also **a-cad-e-mism** (ə-käd'ə-miz'm) *n.* Traditional formalism, especially when reflected in art.

**ac-a-dem-ics** (äk'a-dēm'iks) *n.* (used with a pl. verb) College or university courses and studies: "Academics are a much more important priority to him than athletics" (Gerald McIntosh).



Abu Simbel  
the Great Temple of  
Ramesses II  
Abu Simbel, Egypt



Abyssinian