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GUIDE TO THE DICTIONARY



THE USAGE PANEL

The Usage Panel is a group of nearly 200 prominent scholars, creative writers, journalists, diplomats, and others in occupations requiring mastery of language. Annual surveys have gauged the acceptability of particular usages and grammatical constructions.

THE PANELISTS

be·tween (bi-twen')

Share:

prep.

1.

a. In or through the position or interval separating: *between the trees*; *between 11 o'clock and 12 o'clock*.

b. Intermediate to, as in quantity, amount, or degree: *It costs between 15 and 20 dollars*.

2. Connecting spatially: *a railroad between the two cities*.

3. Associating or uniting in a reciprocal action or relationship: *an agreement between workers and management*; *a certain resemblance between the two stories*.

4. In confidence restricted to: *Between you and me, he is not qualified*.

5.

a. By the combined effort or effect of: *Between them they succeeded*.

b. In the combined ownership of: *They had only a few dollars between them*.

6. As measured against. Often used to express a reciprocal relationship: *choose between riding and walking*.

adv.

In an intermediate space, position, or time; in the interim.

Idioms:

in between

In an intermediate situation: *My roommates disagreed and I was caught in between*.

in between times

During an intervening period; in the meantime: *has written several books and teaches in between times*.

[Middle English *bitwene*, from Old English *betwēonum*; see **dwo-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

between'ness *n.*

Usage Note:

The *-tween* in *between* comes from the same Indo-European root that gave us *two*, *twain*, and *duo*, and the *-mong* of *among* comes from an Old English word that meant "crowd" or "throng." It is thus unsurprising that a traditional rule requires *between* to be used only for sentences involving two items and *among* for sentences involving more than two. Indeed, in sentences involving two items, no rule is needed; native English speakers spontaneously use *between* (as in *the differences between* [not *among*] *karate and judo*). But when there are more than two items, practice is mixed. Many careful writers observe a more subtle distinction, using *among* when the sentence refers to the entities collectively or as a mass, as in *There were many outstanding players among the teams in the quarterfinal round* or *A thistle is growing among the roses*, but preferring *between* when the sentence refers to relationships involving particular pairs of entities from within the group, as in *We haven't yet assigned the matchups between teams in the quarterfinal round* or *I have sand between my toes*. In such sentences, the twoness of *between* has not, so to speak, been lost in the crowd—the pairings within the larger group are important to the meaning of the sentence and thus influence the writer's choice of preposition.

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

Indo-European Roots

Semitic Roots

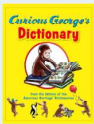
The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our **Dictionary of Indo-European Roots**.

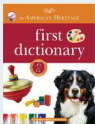
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