



## VOCABULARY LISTS &gt; TEST PREP

# 100 Words Every Middle Schooler Should Know



100 words

December 12, 2014 By [Vocabulary.com](http://Vocabulary.com) (NY) 

American Heritage Dictionaries normally feature about 70,000 entries. From that multitude, the editors have chosen 100 words that are neither obscure nor outlandish that could give middle schoolers more aplomb and aptitude in their verbal encounters. If you're not sure whether that is something you need, study this list.

Words selected by the Editors of the American Heritage® Dictionaries. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

## weather

1.

face and withstand with courage

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*You even get subjected to ridicule, and you have to **weather** that storm.*  
— [Los Angeles Times \(Dec 10, 2014\)](#)

## 2. emerge



come out into view, as from concealment

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*They say that program has helped them **emerge** from the shadows, making possible a work permit, a Social Security number and enhanced self-respect.*  
— [Washington Post](#)

## 3. counter



speak in response

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*The seller can then accept, **counter** or reject the offer.*  
— [US News \(Dec 9, 2014\)](#)

## 4. narrate



narrate or give a detailed account of

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Standing amid bags of garbage, he starts sorting, tearing open plastic bags and **narrating** his finds.*  
— [Los Angeles Times \(Oct 15, 2014\)](#)

## 5. hasten



speed up the progress of; facilitate

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Rather than wait for that day, he set out to **hasten** its arrival.*

— [Scientific American \(Sep 3, 2014\)](#)

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## 6. **obscure** ✓

not clearly understood or expressed

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*The book contains little plot, an abundance of **obscure** poetry and the untimely death of three protagonists.*

— [Los Angeles Times \(Dec 5, 2014\)](#)

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## 7. **potential** ✓

existing in possibility

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*What **potential** global threat should policymakers pay more attention to?*

— [US News \(Dec 11, 2014\)](#)

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## 8. **specimen** ✓

an example regarded as typical of its class

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*The researchers detected it in older starfish samples, museum **specimens** from as early as 1942.*

— [Reuters \(Nov 17, 2014\)](#)

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## 9. **multitude** ✓

a large indefinite number

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*They surround you in their **multitudes** - hundreds, maybe thousands of them, swooping and stinging and injecting venom into your flesh.*

— [BBC \(Oct 9, 2014\)](#)

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## 10. **zeal** ✓

a feeling of strong eagerness (usually in favor of a person or cause)

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*The enthusiasm has caught on among his regulars, who come often, linger and talk about pumpkins with the **zeal** of converts.*

— [Washington Post](#)

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## 11. **diminish** ✓

decrease in size, extent, or range

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*By Friday morning, most of the heavy rain is expected to **diminish**.*

— [Los Angeles Times \(Dec 10, 2014\)](#)

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## 12. **cunning** ✓

shrewdness as demonstrated by being skilled in deception

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Moreover, it was no secret that Cleopatra had ruthless **cunning** and superior intelligence.  
— [Sterling Biographies®: Cleopatra: Egypt's Last and Greatest Queen](#)

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13. **conspicuous** ✓

obvious to the eye or mind

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Today, the link is more **conspicuous**: highlighted in blue, it appears directly beneath the site's login form.  
— [New York Times \(Oct 23, 2014\)](#)

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14. **banish** ✓

ban from a place of residence, as for punishment

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Napoleon loses so big that he is **banished** to an island.  
— [New York Times \(Dec 5, 2014\)](#)

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15. **illuminate** ✓

make free from confusion or ambiguity; make clear

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

The problem is that for **illuminating** answers, you need to ask the right questions.  
— [New York Times \(Dec 6, 2014\)](#)

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16. **kindle** ✓

call forth (emotions, feelings, and responses)

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Recently in class I saw the fire of an idea flicker in a first-year student's eyes—and so to **kindle** it I cold-called him.  
— [Forbes \(Sep 16, 2014\)](#)

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17. **swarm** ✓

move in large numbers

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

In "**Swarm**" mode, the robots instead follow one another, like children chasing a soccer ball.  
— [New York Times \(Dec 1, 2014\)](#)

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18. **persistent** ✓

stubbornly unyielding

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

It says, "together, if we face obstacles and counter the negative with a **persistent** positive, we might just change the world."  
— [Seattle Times \(Dec 1, 2014\)](#)

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19. **tactic** ✓

a plan for attaining a particular goal

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Technology has been used as a crime-fighting **tactic**, but not as a tool to determine what happens during a police action.*

— [New York Times \(Dec 4, 2014\)](#)

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20. **attentive** ✓

taking heed; giving close and thoughtful attention

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*You make sure to be extra **attentive** to your friend.*

— [Time \(Oct 2, 2014\)](#)

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21. **falter** ✓

move hesitatingly, as if about to give way

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*"The rocket has **faltered**, but it won't crash," he said.*

— [New York Times \(Nov 20, 2014\)](#)

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22. **disdain** ✓

lack of respect accompanied by a feeling of intense dislike

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*In the visage of Grumpy Cat, it seems, her fans found the perfect holy expression of indifferent **disdain** for all things.*

— [Washington Post](#)

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23. **defiance** ✓

a hostile challenge

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Schools still could expel students for violating school rules or laws and could suspend students for willful **defiance** of authorities in grades 4 through 12.*

— [Washington Times \(Sep 27, 2014\)](#)

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24. **destination** ✓

the place designated as the end (as of a race or journey)

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Airports get stacked up with planes that can't take off for their **destinations**.*

— [Forbes \(Dec 9, 2014\)](#)

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25. **dismal** ✓

causing dejection

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*It's been a pretty **dismal** month, as far as world events go, but the news wasn't all bad thanks to some very entertaining on-air mishaps.*

— [Time \(Aug 28, 2014\)](#)

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## 26. precipice



a very steep cliff

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

"Every minute of every day, we were on the **precipice** of failure, which is an exciting place to be," Marsh says.

— [Los Angeles Times \(Nov 25, 2014\)](#)

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## 27. bluff



frighten someone by pretending to be stronger than one really is

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Sporting a pith helmet, Nixon observed that "whoever is talking the loudest is pretty sure to be **bluffing**."

— [New York Times \(Sep 19, 2014\)](#)

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## 28. adversary



someone who offers opposition

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

The students are united by shared suffering, and by a common **adversary**.

— [New York Times \(Nov 10, 2014\)](#)

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## 29. waver



pause or hold back in uncertainty or unwillingness

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

He is tough as nails, never **wavers**, speaks the truth and stays focused.

— [New York Times \(Oct 13, 2014\)](#)

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## 30. subside



wear off or die down

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

The virus has a history of **subsiding**, then flaring up again.

— [Washington Post](#)

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## 31. muster



gather or bring together

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Fans chanted and hollered and enriched the arena with as much life as they could possibly **muster**.

— [New York Times \(Dec 10, 2014\)](#)

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## 32. pertinent



having precise or logical relevance to the matter at hand

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

You write about things that feel **pertinent** and urgent to you, and that varies depending on what stage of life you are going through.

— [MSNBC \(Jul 11, 2014\)](#)

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33. **vigilant** ✓

carefully observant or attentive; on the lookout for possible danger

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Because there are so many scammers out there, banks are **vigilant** about verifying that you are who you say you are.

— [Washington Post](#)

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34. **ominous** ✓

threatening or foreshadowing evil or tragic developments

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

"Evil forces around the world want to harm Americans every day," an **ominous** voiceover states.

— [Time \(Oct 7, 2014\)](#)

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35. **habitation** ✓

the act of dwelling in or living permanently in a place (said of both animals and men)

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Although the area is not fit for human **habitation**, many poor people who work in the coal mines live here.

— [BBC \(Aug 13, 2013\)](#)

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36. **vulnerable** ✓

capable of being wounded or hurt

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Second, older cells are more **vulnerable** to this damage—or less able to repair themselves.

— [Scientific American \(Dec 9, 2014\)](#)

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37. **monotonous** ✓

sounded or spoken in a tone unvarying in pitch

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Unfortunately, their **monotonous** verbiage reminds me of Charlie Brown's teacher in the "Peanuts" TV shows.

— [Washington Post](#)

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38. **luminous** ✓

softly bright or radiant

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

It was briefly one of the most **luminous** stars in the galaxy.

— [New York Times \(Sep 3, 2014\)](#)

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39. **fragrance** ✓

a distinctive odor that is pleasant

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*After 30 minutes in the oven, what hits you first is the enticing, warm **fragrance** that fills your kitchen.*

— [Washington Post](#)

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40. **imperious** ✓

having or showing arrogant superiority to and disdain of those one views as unworthy

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*It was a little scary how quickly he flipped from friendly to **imperious**.*

— [New York Times \(Sep 4, 2013\)](#)

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41. **impending** ✓

close in time; about to occur

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*First, he gives the enemy 12 days of warning about **impending** air attacks.*

— [Washington Post](#)

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42. **engross** ✓

consume all of one's attention or time

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*I don't know how long I was reading; I was so **engrossed** in the paper that I did not hear any footsteps.*

— [Long Walk to Freedom](#)

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43. **commotion** ✓

confused movement

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Moments later came **commotion**, followed by shouts of "Stop pushing me!"*

— [MSNBC \(Sep 26, 2014\)](#)

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44. **momentum** ✓

an impelling force or strength

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Mitchell believed that a song's **momentum** should always push upward, ascending like the slope of a mountain into the unknown.*

— [Washington Post](#)

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45. **deft** ✓

skillful in physical movements; especially of the hands

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*To make it work requires a **deft** hand.*

— [Forbes \(Sep 25, 2014\)](#)

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**46. misgiving** ✓

uneasiness about the fitness of an action

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Quite a few said they had come despite the **misgivings** of parents who wanted them to focus on studying.

— [New York Times \(Sep 26, 2014\)](#)

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**47. dispel** ✓

force to go away; used both with concrete and metaphoric meanings

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

For most of us, **dispelling** the darkness is as simple as turning on a light.

— [Time \(Oct 23, 2014\)](#)

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**48. furtive** ✓

secret and sly or sordid

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

What muffled whispers do they share, what **furtive** games are they playing?

— [The Guardian \(Dec 18, 2012\)](#)

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**49. barricade** ✓

block off with barricades

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

The Secret Service ordered nearby streets and parking lots **barricaded** for security.

— [Washington Times \(Dec 1, 2014\)](#)

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**50. repugnant** ✓

offensive to the mind

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

The truth is that we need only look at recent human history to find real, live, utterly **repugnant** evil.

— [Salon \(Sep 4, 2014\)](#)

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**51. exhilarate** ✓

fill with sublime emotion

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

"To see Yosemite Falls coming to life this morning is truly **exhilarating**," Park Superintendent Don Neubacher said in a statement.

— [Los Angeles Times \(Dec 3, 2014\)](#)

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**52. serenity** ✓

the absence of mental stress or anxiety

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:



The surrounding waters and beautiful pools that surround the hotel create a real sense of calm and luxurious **serenity**.  
— [Forbes \(Jul 25, 2014\)](#)

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### 53. **apprehensive** ✓

in fear or dread of possible evil or harm

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Virga still feels **apprehensive** when visiting an unfamiliar zoo.  
— [New York Times \(Jul 3, 2014\)](#)

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### 54. **circumference** ✓

the size of something as given by the distance around it

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

That's almost 10 times the **circumference** of the Earth, which is a surprisingly small 24,859.82 miles.  
— [BBC \(Dec 1, 2014\)](#)

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### 55. **waft** ✓

be driven or carried along, as by the air

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

The birds were chirping, and a warm breeze **wafted** through the screens.  
— [Washington Post](#)

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### 56. **ember** ✓

a hot fragment of wood or coal that is left from a fire and is glowing or smoldering

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

"Every hot spot is an **ember** that, if not contained, can become a new fire," Obama said.  
— [Los Angeles Times \(Dec 2, 2014\)](#)

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### 57. **ignite** ✓

cause to start burning; subject to fire or great heat

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Firefighters say the blaze started when stain-soaked rags **ignited** on the front porch.  
— [Washington Times \(Dec 10, 2014\)](#)

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### 58. **scarcity** ✓

a small and inadequate amount

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Water—its **scarcity**, quality and the regulations affecting it—is becoming a new corporate headache.  
— [Economist \(Nov 6, 2014\)](#)

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### 59. **swagger** ✓

a proud stiff pompous gait

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*The Giants had arrived here with the **swagger** of a team that had won two of the last four World Series titles.*

— [New York Times \(Oct 3, 2014\)](#)

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60. **uncanny** ✓

surpassing the ordinary or normal

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*The Dark Sky App tells you the weather where you are with an **uncanny** accuracy.*

— [Forbes \(Jun 26, 2014\)](#)

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61. **sociable** ✓

friendly and pleasant

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Running with others is really **sociable** and great fun.*

— [BBC \(Apr 10, 2014\)](#)

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62. **foresight** ✓

seeing ahead; knowing in advance; foreseeing

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*But nobody had the wherewithal or **foresight** to think that day would actually happen.*

— [MSNBC \(Jul 3, 2014\)](#)

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63. **quell** ✓

overcome or allay

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*The White House has tried to **quell** anxieties about the danger of Ebola spreading in the United States.*

— [Washington Post](#)

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64. **replenish** ✓

fill something that had previously been emptied

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*They bring in dredged sand to **replenish** the beach.*

— [Washington Post](#)

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65. **jostle** ✓

make one's way by jostling, pushing, or shoving

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*In Jerusalem, great religions have crowded and **jostled** their way down through millennia.*

— [Los Angeles Times \(Nov 21, 2014\)](#)

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66. **brandish** ✓

move or swing back and forth

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Hart **brandished** a "Free Hugs" sign as he stood alone in front of a police barricade.  
— [MSNBC \(Nov 30, 2014\)](#)

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67. **versatile** ✓

able to move freely in all directions

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Eggs are among the most **versatile** foods and the proteins change when you heat them, beat them or mix them with other ingredients.  
— [US News \(Dec 10, 2014\)](#)

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68. **knoll** ✓

a small natural hill

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

The home, set on a quarter-acre **knoll**, has views of the city, the Hollywood Reservoir and the Hollywood sign.  
— [Los Angeles Times \(Aug 9, 2014\)](#)

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69. **aptitude** ✓

inherent ability

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

I was recently asked in an interview, what is more valued by companies – **aptitude** or attitude?  
— [Forbes \(Sep 12, 2014\)](#)

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70. **scurry** ✓

to move about or proceed hurriedly

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

Ever wonder how cockroaches **scurry** around in the dark while you fumble to switch on the kitchen light?  
— [Science Magazine \(Dec 3, 2014\)](#)

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71. **debris** ✓

the remains of something that has been destroyed or broken up

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

The blast rattled their homes and sent **debris** flying onto nearby properties, they said.  
— [Washington Times \(Dec 4, 2014\)](#)

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72. **somber** ✓

grave or even gloomy in character

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

It was also the day before one of the most **somber** of American anniversaries: Pearl Harbor was bombed 73 years ago Sunday.

— [Washington Post](#)

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**73. jut** ✓

extend out or project in space

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*From its long beak juts a fearsome tooth.*

— [New York Times \(Nov 10, 2014\)](#)

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**74. jargon** ✓

specialized technical terminology characteristic of a particular subject

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Steer clear of jargon, me-too claims, and statements without substance.*

— [Forbes \(Dec 5, 2014\)](#)

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**75. terse** ✓

brief and to the point; effectively cut short

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*It's a request to which Dipper responds, with terse eloquence, "Weird."*

— [New York Times \(Nov 21, 2014\)](#)

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**76. restitution** ✓

a sum of money paid in compensation for loss or injury

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*While restitution is paid to the victim, criminal fines and felony assessments are paid to a crime victims' fund.*

— [Washington Times \(Nov 21, 2014\)](#)

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**77. headway** ✓

forward movement

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*At times, you feel like you're struggling to run forward, going through the motions but making no headway, frozen in place.*

— [Washington Post](#)

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**78. exasperation** ✓

an exasperated feeling of annoyance

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Like many a teenager on his school holidays, Parys is in bed, his mother explains with exasperation.*

— [The Guardian \(Aug 2, 2014\)](#)

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**79. materialize** ✓

come into being; become reality

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*By the time people reach their 70s, they're beginning to look back at the plans they made and dreams they had that never **materialized**.*

— [Time \(Nov 25, 2014\)](#)

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80. **recluse** ✓

one who lives in solitude

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Long before his days as the world's most famous **recluse**, Howard Hughes flew planes fast and far.*

— [New York Times \(Jul 14, 2014\)](#)

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81. **meander** ✓

to move or cause to move in a sinuous, spiral, or circular course

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Instead of straight paths and noisy throngs, the new park will have **meandering** walkways and quiet places for picnicking nestled in gently sloping "lawn valleys."*

— [Chicago Tribune \(Jul 26, 2014\)](#)

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82. **outlandish** ✓

conspicuously or grossly unconventional or unusual

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Not everything in the show is **outlandish**; some events are all too realistic.*

— [New York Times \(Nov 16, 2014\)](#)

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83. **meticulous** ✓

marked by extreme care in treatment of details

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*It's a six-page scene and very **meticulous**, step by step.*

— [Los Angeles Times \(Aug 24, 2014\)](#)

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84. **sabotage** ✓

destroy property or hinder normal operations

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*"We want at least a district that won't **sabotage** the dreams of its youths."*

— [Los Angeles Times \(Nov 21, 2014\)](#)

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85. **gusto** ✓

vigorous and enthusiastic enjoyment

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*They each approach their tasks with **gusto** that can only be admired, even if the results can't.*

— [Washington Times \(Aug 21, 2014\)](#)

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86. **translucent** ✓

allowing light to pass through diffusely

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*It comes in several colors, including attractive **translucent** ones.*  
— [Washington Times \(Jul 30, 2014\)](#)

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87. **eavesdrop** ✓

listen without the speaker's knowledge

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*They **eavesdrop** on the noises that other birds make while hiding food in order to steal the stash later, new research shows.*  
— [Science Magazine \(Nov 21, 2014\)](#)

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88. **recuperate** ✓

restore to good health or strength

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Sleep is the time when your body **recuperates** and rebuilds from the day's stress.*  
— [US News \(Jun 24, 2014\)](#)

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89. **contortion** ✓

a tortuous and twisted shape or position

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*There was tumbling, human pyramids and bodies stretched into extraordinary **contortions**.*  
— [BBC \(Aug 25, 2013\)](#)

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90. **egregious** ✓

conspicuously and outrageously bad or reprehensible

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Prosecutors questioned him about killings and other **egregious** human rights abuses perpetrated by his regime.*  
— [Los Angeles Times \(Oct 4, 2014\)](#)

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91. **unsightly** ✓

unpleasant to look at

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*But that's just a quibble, an **unsightly** pimple on what is a greater problem.*  
— [The Guardian \(Oct 14, 2014\)](#)

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92. **pristine** ✓

completely free from dirt or contamination

EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*Back at the jail, Snow White is getting under Anna's skin a bit – shaking her once **pristine** view of the princess.*  
— [Los Angeles Times \(Dec 8, 2014\)](#)

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**93. jabber** ✓

talk in a noisy, excited, or declamatory manner

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

A parrot **jabbered** atop its cage and a monkey squealed and battered at its bronze ring, until its owner brought bananas.

— [Bartlett, Paul Alexander](#)

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**94. stamina** ✓

enduring strength and energy

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

A 6-year-old might not want to walk the mile into Petra, but teenagers have enough physical and intellectual **stamina** to appreciate going to these places.

— [New York Times \(Dec 5, 2014\)](#)

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**95. plenteous** ✓

affording an abundant supply

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

"The harvest truly is **plenteous**, but the labourers are few."

— [Wilson, J. M. \(James Maurice\)](#)

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**96. brackish** ✓

slightly salty (especially from containing a mixture of seawater and fresh water)

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

**Brackish** water can be used, but freshwater is easier and less costly.

— [New York Times \(May 14, 2014\)](#)

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**97. concoction** ✓

any foodstuff made by combining different ingredients

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

There are some food combos that blend beautifully with each other to create truly tasty **concoctions**.

— [US News \(Sep 4, 2014\)](#)

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**98. grueling** ✓

characterized by effort to the point of exhaustion; especially physical effort

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

As of Dec. 19, 22 students will have made it through a **grueling** curriculum that requires about 700 hours of computer code.

— [Washington Times \(Dec 10, 2014\)](#)

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**99. malleable** ✓

easily influenced

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*"Memory is so **malleable** or volatile that each time we see something, the memory is actually influenced and re-created."*

— [Washington Times \(Oct 18, 2014\)](#)

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100. **aplomb** 

great coolness and composure under strain

## EXAMPLE SENTENCE:

*I wish I had handled it with **aplomb**.*

— [New York Times \(May 18, 2014\)](#)

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