

Greek Lesson 14

The goals of Greek Lesson 14 are to review terms which come from the idiomatic source of sports and games — we'll cover that in this very short video presentation — and in the accompanying audio presentation we'll look over the Greek suffixes and bases in this lesson. Don't forget to listen to that audio when you're done here.

Humans everywhere enjoy playing games. As far as we can tell, they always have. Some scholars have even suggested that the designation of our species should be, instead of *homo sapiens* (“thinking man”), *homo ludens* (“playing man”). And so, given how much time we frolic and cavort, it's no surprise that English is full of words based on gaming and sports, for instance, “jeopardy” which comes from a French phrase *jeu parti* meaning “a divided game,” that is, a tie. The sense of “even score” easily slipped over into “uncertainty,” and thus “a hazardous situation.”

“Forfeit” is another word which belongs to the sports-and-games idiomatic group. It also comes from French. During the early modern era, the English imported several of their games from France including tennis, croquet, hockey, as can be seen from the Frenchness of the names for these games. “Forfeit” derives from *forfait*, the French word for “crime” — *for(s)* means “outside” and *fait* means “done” — so the sense is that something's been “done outside” of the law or the rules. Later, forfeit took on the meaning “transgression, an overstepping of some boundary or line,” and when applied to sports, it came to denote “misconduct.” The word then specialized in sense into a specific kind of misconduct, “a penalty for failure to show up at a sporting event.”

The word “marathon” didn't begin life as a sports term. It originally referred to a place name and a famous military event in which a man named Phidippides ran from the site of a battle in a place called Marathon to his home city Athens in order to report the Athenians' victory over the Persians. How far is it, do you guess, from Marathon to Athens? That's right. 26.2 miles. The first modern Olympic Games held in 1896 introduced a race of that length among the events in the track-and-field competition. That heralded a new age in distance running, as well as a slew of nasty hybrids after the second half of word -athon became inexplicably dismembered from the first and turned into a suffix with the sense “a protracted event.” The result was monstrosities like telethon, dance-athon, walk-athon, bike-athon, skate-athon, and so-on-athon. Here's a new one: the horror, the horror-athon.

Finally, one more sporting term: “arena” which comes from the Latin word *harena* (“sand”). Sand was used in the stadiums where Roman gladiators fought to soak up the blood of those wounded and slain. There's something to think about when you attend a game in some arena.

Mr. Ayers complements my list of sporting terms with several of his own, ranging from “check” to “pitfall,” and from “bias” to “dark horse.” As with other terms from idiomatic sources, please memorize the meaning of these words and phrases, if you don't already know them, and be able to identify their source.

To end this presentation, let's change our tune to something different ... and mournful! Something Halloween-y. In the last lesson you learned the suffix *-phobia* ("the [purportedly] abnormal fear of"). There are lots of possible things out there to fear so let's see how many phobia's you know, or have, starting with ... acrophobia. What's that? "The fear of ... heights." As you know, the base ACR- means "high." What about agoraphobia? What's that? "The fear of ... public places." Get it? See how to do this? Okay, then, I'll let you go through the rest of these on your own. Enjoy them — in a creepy sort of way.

And that's it for the video presentation for Greek Lesson 14. Next you should listen to the audio presentation on the prefixes and bases in this lesson. You'll find a link to that audio presentation on the course web site.

Happy etymologizing!

ASSIGNMENT

This is the audio presentation covering the assignment in Greek Lesson 14. Please open your textbook to page 233. This lesson focuses on suffixes used primarily in science and technology. The first pair, *-meter* and *-metry*, are extensions of the base METR- meaning "measure," which you should add to your list of things to memorize. You'll need that base to analyze words like "symmetry"; see sentence 5 of this assignment. Also, let's add another variant of this suffix, *-metr-*, which looks just like the base but this variant is used when it's followed by another suffix, as in *-metric*. All these forms are really a combination of two classical elements: the base ME- meaning "measure" — this base shows up in English words like "measure" and "meal," meal originally referring to food provided at an appointed or after a measured amount of time — plus the suffix *-tron* (or just *-tr-*) meaning "an instrument for," in this case "an instrument for measuring," which is what the base METR- and the suffix *-meter* really mean.

Much the same holds true for the suffixes *-graph*, *-graphy* and *-gram*, all of which refer to "writing" one way or another. They come from a base GRA-/GRAPH- meaning "write." Please put that base also on your to-memorize list. You'll need it for words like "paragraph" and "anagram." The Greek base GRAPH- originally meant "to scratch," as did the English word "write." You can almost hear that sense if you reinsert the w- at the beginning of our word: *wwrite!* That's some onomatopoeia, wouldn't you say? Thus, both "write" and "graph" make it clear that early forms of written words were scratched onto surfaces like tree bark or stone.

Finally, the suffix *-scope* is a close cousin of the base SCOP- meaning "watch, look, view." A word like "periscope" requires that you interpret this form as a base.

On to the bases then for this lesson. The first BAR- ("weight, pressure") is not to be confused with another Greek base BARBAR- ("foreigner") which gives us words like "barbarian" and "barbaric." Ayers does not include this BARBAR- base in his book. Note that BAR-'s sense "weight" implies "put pressure on," and things under pressure tend to go "low." So, add "low" as a meaning here. This connotation is applied to the human voice. What is one of the lower male singing registers? A baritone.

Skipping down a few items on this list, be careful to distinguish between the Greek base ORA- (“see”) and its Latin lookalike OR- (“plead”). They are not related. The Greek base ORA- is often combined with the suffix *-ma*, creating the double suffix *-orama* as in panorama, literally “the result of looking (ORA-) all around (PAN-).” Because the all-around sense of *-orama* implies hugeness and spectacle, it has been carried into a number of revolting hybrids usually referring to big, splashy events like a boatarama, motorama, Chuck-a-rama. Yuck-arama! Even their non-hybrid kin, like glamorama, Cinerama and dramarama, are disgusting.

To end this lesson, please add the form PHOS- to the base PHOT- (“light”). You’ll need that form to etymologize words like “phosphorus, phosphate.” What does phosphorus literally do? It “brings (PHOR-) light (PHOS-).” The element is highly reactive and glows when exposed to oxygen.

And that’s it for this audi-orama presentation. Short is sweet!

Happy Etymologizing!