

Webster's  
New Explorer  
Vocabulary  
Skill Builder

MARY WOOD CORNOG

Created in Cooperation with  
the Editors of  
MERRIAM-WEBSTER



A Division of Merriam-Webster, Incorporated  
Springfield, Massachusetts

Copyright © by Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

Federal Street Press and New Explorer are trademarks of  
Federal Street Press, a division of Merriam-Webster, Incorporated.

All rights reserved. No part of this book covered by the copyrights hereon  
may be reproduced or copied in any form or by any means—graphic,  
electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, taping,  
or information storage and retrieval systems—  
without written permission of the publisher.

This 2008 edition published by  
Federal Street Press,  
A Division of Merriam-Webster, Incorporated  
P.O. Box 281  
Springfield, MA 01102

Federal Street Press books are available for bulk purchase for  
sales promotion and premium use. For details write the manager of  
special sales, Federal Street Press, P.O. Box 281, Springfield, MA 01102

ISBN 13: 978-1-59695-045-0

ISBN 10: 1-59695-045-5

Printed in the United States of America

08 09 10 11 12 5 4 3 2 1

# UNIT

# 1

---

**BENE** is Latin for “well.” A *benefit* is a good result or effect. Something *beneficial* produces good results or effects. The Latin root can be heard in other languages as well: “Good!” or “Fine!” in Spanish is “Bueno!”; in French, it’s “Bon!”; and in Italian, just say “Bene!”

---

**benediction** \ˌbe-nə-ˈdɪk-shən\ A prayer that asks for God’s blessing, especially a prayer that concludes a worship service.

- The moment the bishop had finished his benediction, she squeezed quickly out of her row and darted out the cathedral’s side entrance.

In *benediction*, the *bene* root is joined by another Latin root, *dictio*, “speaking” (see *DICT*, p. 272), so the word’s meaning becomes something like “well-wishing.” Perhaps the best-known benediction is the so-called Aaronic Benediction from the Bible, which begins, “May the Lord bless you and keep you.” An important section of the Catholic Mass was traditionally known as the *Benedictus*, after its first word (meaning “blessed”). It was St. *Benedict* who organized the first Christian monasteries; many Christians have been baptized Benedict in his honor, and 16 popes have taken it as their papal name.

**benefactor** \ˌbe-nə-ˈfak-tər\ Someone who helps another person or group, especially by giving money.

- An anonymous benefactor had given \$15 million to establish an ecological institute at the university.

A benefactor may be involved in almost any field. One may endow a scholarship fund; another may give money to expand a library; still another may leave a generous sum to a hospital in her will. The famous *benefactions* of John D. Rockefeller included the gifts that established the University of Chicago, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Rockefeller University. Many benefactors have reported that giving away their money turned out to be the most rewarding thing they ever did.

**beneficiary** \ˌbe-nə-ˈfi-shē-er-ē\ A person or organization that benefits or is expected to benefit from something, especially one that receives money or property when someone dies.

- Living in a trailer in near-poverty, she received word in the mail that her father had died, naming her as the sole beneficiary of his life-insurance policy.

*Beneficiary* is often used in connection with life insurance, but it shows up in many other contexts as well. A college may be the beneficiary of a private donation. Your uncle's will may make a church his sole beneficiary, in which case all his money and property will go to it when he dies. A "third-party beneficiary" of a contract is a person (often a child) who the people signing the contract (which is usually an insurance policy or an employee-benefit plan) want to benefit from it. In a more general way, a small business may be a beneficiary of changes to the tax code, or a restaurant may be the beneficiary when the one across the street closes down and its whole lunch crowd starts coming in.

**benevolence** \bə-ˈnev-ləns\ Kindness, generosity.

- In those financially desperate years, the young couple was saved only by the benevolence of her elderly great-uncle.

Part of *benevolence* comes from the Latin root meaning "wish." The novels of Charles Dickens often include a *benevolent* figure who rescues the main characters at some point—Mr. Brownlow in *Oliver Twist*, Abel Magwitch in *David Copperfield*, Mr. Jarndyce in *Bleak House*, Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. To be benevolent, it helps to have money, but it's not necessary; kind assistance of a non-financial sort may turn out to be lifesaving benevolence as well.

### Quizzes

**A. Fill in each blank with the correct letter:**

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| a. grave     | e. alleviate  |
| b. gravitate | f. cantilever |
| c. gravitas  | g. levity     |
| d. aggravate | h. elevation  |
1. Even the smallest motion would \_\_\_\_\_ the pain in his shoulder.
  2. She hesitated to step onto the balcony, which was supported by a single \_\_\_\_\_.
  3. At their father's funeral they showed the same solemn \_\_\_\_\_ at which they had often laughed during his lifetime.
  4. To relieve the swelling, the doctor recommended \_\_\_\_\_ of her legs several times a day.
  5. Attracted magically by the music, all animals and natural objects would \_\_\_\_\_ toward the sound of Orpheus's lyre.
  6. With the two armies moving toward the border, they knew the situation was \_\_\_\_\_.
  7. The neighboring nations organized an airlift of supplies to \_\_\_\_\_ the suffering caused by the drought.
  8. The board meeting ended in an unusual mood of \_\_\_\_\_ when a man in a gorilla suit burst in.

**B. Match the word on the left to the correct definition on the right:**

- |               |                            |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| 1. levity     | a. solemn dignity          |
| 2. gravitas   | b. relieve                 |
| 3. grave      | c. raising                 |
| 4. alleviate  | d. support beam            |
| 5. elevation  | e. move toward as if drawn |
| 6. aggravate  | f. lack of seriousness     |
| 7. cantilever | g. serious                 |
| 8. gravitate  | h. worsen                  |