

## How is the Base of a Latin Verb Determined?

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The process of determining the base of a Latin verb is systematic and consistent. A typical Latin verb has four “principal parts” which are inflected into over 300 different forms! For example, the Latin verb “to come” is *venio*, *venire*, *veni* (with a long “e”), *ventus*. These four forms mean, in order: (1) I come; (2) to come (the infinitive); (3) I have come (perfect active); (4) having (been) come (perfect passive participle). Because these forms are needed to recognize and produce all inflections of the verb in Latin, students of Latin routinely memorize all four “principal parts” as they learn Latin vocabulary.

When it comes to English derivatives, however, students do not learn all four parts of the verb. They need only two in order to recognize and produce the English words built on each base. From the second principal part (i.e., *venire*) we remove the infinitive ending (-*ire*) to find the base *ven*. From the fourth principal part (i.e., *ventus*), we remove the -*us* ending to find the base *vent*. **As a result, the Latin base for the verb “to come” in its two forms is *ven*, *vent*. These are the only two forms English students need to learn in order to identify and produce the nearly 100 derivatives of this base!**

Once the base enters the world of English word-formation, English spelling and pronunciation rules take over. These patterns are regular and largely reliable, but they are flexible and display variations. For example, there are multiple ways to spell the “long e” sound in a word. We can produce it by writing a single vowel (e.g., *evil*, *lethal*, *ether*, *alleviate*); in such words, the vowel is “long by nature.” We can also double the vowel (e.g., *reel*, *feet*, *screen*, *teen*). We can also write a digraph in which the “long e” sound dominates (e.g., *bean*, *team*, *scream*, *piece*, *fiefdom*, *receipt*). Finally, we can add a “silent e” to the end of the word to lengthen the “e” within that syllable (e.g., *gene*, *meme*). In passing, it bears mentioning that some spellings of the same sounds and words have changed over time and/or according to regional preferences. For example, British tradition prefers *colour* and *honour*, while the American preference is for *color* and *honor*. These spelling variations do not affect meaning. Likewise, we observe the “peaceful coexistence” of *pediatrician* / *paediatrician*, *encyclopedia* / *encyclopaedia*, *archaeology* / *archeology*, and even *lacrimose* / *lachrymose*.

Returning to the base *ven*, *vent*, we find the two forms in a large range of English words. When people “come together” in a meeting, for example, they *convene*. The “long e” sound of the second syllable is generated by the final “silent e.” The base of the word remains *ven*, to which a *silent e* has been appended to guide correct English pronunciation (lest we mispronounce it as “*conven*”). Similarly, when we “come between” fighting dogs, we *intervene*. When we *contravene* the law, we “come against” rules and regulations by violating them. **The final e in these words guides pronunciation, not meaning. The meaning is carried by the base, *ven*.** Other examples of the *ven* form of this base include the words *venue*, *avenue*, *convenient*, *convenience*, *provenance*, and

*provenience*. When students learn vocabulary through the roots approach, they apply English spelling patterns to Latin bases.

The other form of the base, *vent*, also generates multiple derivatives. Such words as *convent*, *event*, *prevent*, *circumvent*, *advent*, and *invent* are readily recognizable since they end in the base itself. But many other derivatives add suffixes: *convention* / *conventional*; *invention* / *inventive* / *inventor* / *inventory*; *prevention* / *preventive* / *preventable*; *adventure* / *adventurous* / *adventuresome* / *misadventure*; and *eventual* / *eventuality* / *eventually* / *eventful*. Suffixes expand the range of a base's derivatives into all parts of speech: "to *invent*" (verb), "an *invention*" (noun), "a famous *inventor*" (noun), "an *inventive* mind" (adjective). What matters for English speakers and readers is the ability to identify the base of these words as *vent*, to which suffixes are appended. It is important also that students recognize that *ven* and *vent* words are etymologically connected to one another, i.e., that they share meaning. For example, business leaders and political delegates *convene* by "coming together" in *conventions*, but nuns "come together" in religious communities called *convents*. **To figure out all the English derivatives of this base, students just need to know the two simple forms: *ven*, *vent* = come.**

**For more information:**

Rasinski, T., Padak, N., Newton, R.M., Newton, E. (2020). *Building Vocabulary with Greek and Latin Roots* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Huntington Beach, CA: Shell Education.

Rasinski, T., Padak, N., Newton, R.M., Newton, E. (2020). *Building Vocabulary from Word Roots K-11* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Huntington Beach, CA: Teacher Created Materials.

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