

COMMON FOREIGN WORDS IN ENGLISH

Common Foreign Words	Source Language	Etymology/Origin/Meaning	Trivia/Comments/Usage
addenda	Latin	A list of additions.	
ad lib	Latin	Improvised.	One of the most common foreign words used in English to describe actors and politicians who go <i>off-piste</i> .
ad hoc	Latin	For a particular purpose.	
ad infinitum	Latin	To infinity.	
à la carte	French FR	From the menu.	
ad nauseam	Latin	To the point of <u>nausea</u> , to a sickening degree.	Trevor talked <i>ad nauseam</i> about his career.
addenda	Latin	A list of additions.	
aficionado	Spanish ES	An ardent fan.	
agent provocateur	French FR	Agent who incites others to illegal action.	Agent Provocateur is also a luxury lingerie brand name.
alcohol	Arabic	Originally “al-kuhl” ancient Egyptian eyeliner, later any fine powder or distilled spirit or essence.	Alcoholic beverages include beers, wines and spirits.
alfresco	Italian IT	Fresh air, outdoors.	
alma mater	Latin	Former school (Latin “bountiful mother”).	My <i>alma mater</i> is the university of life, which does not award degrees.
alter ego	Latin	Second self.	
angst	German DE	Dread, anxiety.	
ars gratia artis	Latin	Art for art’s sake.	MGM’s Leo the lion’s head is inside a garland of film with the motto “ <i>Ars Gratia Artis</i> ”.
au fait	French FR	Familiar with something (French “to the point”).	
au naturel	French FR	Natural state, naked.	
avant-garde	French FR	Unorthodox, experimental (French “front guard”).	
avatar	Hindi	Icon or representation of a person online.	You can often change your avatar on websites and in computer games.
baksheesh	Persian	Tip (Persian “gift”).	
ballet	French FR	Form of dance. From earlier latin <i>ballare</i> “to dance”.	French is the language of ballet, e.g. tutu and ballerina.
bete noire	French FR	Personal annoyance, bugbear (French “black beast”).	
blitzkrieg	German DE	Sudden overwhelming attack (German “lightning war”).	
<u>bon appétit</u>	French FR	Enjoy your meal (French “good appetite”).	One of the most common foreign words in English, probably because we don’t have an English equivalent.
bon vivant	French FR	Lover of good life.	
bon voyage	French FR	Have a nice trip.	We wished Natasha <i>bon voyage</i> as she left to go traveling.

bona fide	Latin	In good faith, genuine.	John's doctor was a <i>bona fide</i> expert in dementia.
bravura	Italian IT	Performed with energy and skill.	
cafe	French FR	From coffee in many languages, one of the most common foreign words.	Cafés usually serve coffee.
carpe diem	Latin	Seize the day.	Made famous by <u>Robin Williams</u> in the movie Dead Poets Society.
carpe noctem	Latin	Seize the night (this is not really in very common usage, but we loved the concept of seizing the night instead of the day!).	
carte blanche	French FR	Complete freedom, unlimited authority (French "white card").	Ron was given <i>carte blanche</i> to choose a new truck.
sus belli	Latin	Pretext or reason that justifies or allegedly justifies an attack of war.	
caveat emptor	Latin	Let the buyer beware.	Item sold as seen, <i>caveat emptor</i> .
chow	Chinese CN	Food, "chow down" means to eat.	Many Chinese words used in English relate to food.
chutzpah	Yiddish	Gall, audacity.	
cojones	Spanish ES	Testicles, balls, guts.	
cordon bleu	French FR	Food cooked to high standard (French "blue ribbon").	
corpus delicti	Latin	The evidence required to prove a crime has been committed.	
coup de grace	French FR	A blow of mercy.	
cul-de-sac	French FR	Dead end (French "bottom of the sack").	
de facto	French FR	Actual.	
de rigueur	French FR	Obligatory.	
déjà vu	French FR	Sense of having already experienced something (French "already seen").	Déjà vu is one of the most common foreign expressions in English of French origin.
derrière	French FR	Behind, bum, bottom, buttocks.	
deus ex machine	Latin	God of the machine.	
doppelgänger	German DE	Ghostly counterpart of a living person (German "double-goer").	
double entendre	French FR	Double meaning.	
droit du seigneur	French FR	Excessive demands on subordinate. Literally "the lord's right" to take the virginity of a new bride.	
élan	French FR	Flair.	
enfant terrible	French FR	A bad child.	
en masse	French FR	In a large group.	The crowd voted with their feet and left en masse.
entrepreneur	French FR	Businessman. From 19th century "entreprendre", a director of a musical institution.	Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Oprah Winfrey are famous entrepreneurs.
ersatz	German DE	A substitute.	

eureka	Greek GR	Joyous moment of discovery.	Ancient Greek scholar Archimedes reportedly exclaimed “Eureka!” On getting into a bath Archimedes realised his body displaced the same volume of water causing the water level to rise.
fait accompli	French FR	An established fact.	Losing the vote for president was a <i>fait accompli</i> .
fata morgana	Italian IT	A striking mirage.	
fatwa	Arabic	A legal opinion expressed by Islamic leader.	
faux pas	French FR	Breach of social etiquette, social blunder (French “false step”) or mistake.	Wearing a long white dress as a wedding guest was a <i>faux pas</i> .
femme fatale	French FR	Highly attractive woman who means trouble.	
fiasco	Italian IT	Disaster.	
force de frappe	French FR	France’s nuclear deterrent (French “superior force”).	
gauntlet / gantlet	Swedish SE	Swedish (gatlopp “lane course running”). The pronunciation in English was corrupted to “gauntlet” (French gantelet “armored glove”).	Running the gauntlet (UK) or gantlet (US) was a form of punishment where the victim was forced to run between two rows of torturers. “Throw down the gauntlet” is to issue a challenge and “take up the gauntlet” accepts the challenge.
gemütlich	German DE	Cosy.	
gestalt	German DE	Form, shape.	
gesundheit	German DE	Health, bless you.	
glasnost	Russian RU	Openness (Russian “openness, publicity”).	When the Soviet Union crumbled (1986-1991), <i>glasnost</i> was one of most common foreign words used in English language.
glitch	Yiddish	A minor fault, bug, gremlin etc. (Yiddish “gletshn” to slide or skid) or (German “glitschen” to slip).	Neo experienced <i>déjà vu</i> as “a glitch in the matrix” when he saw the same black cat walk past a door twice.
grand mal	French FR	Epilepsy attack (French “large illness”).	
gringo	Spanish ES	Foreigner (mainly Mexican).	
gung-ho	Chinese CN	Enthusiasm, zealous (Chinese “work together”)	Adopted as a battle cry by some American military units.
guru	Hindi	Spiritual leader.	
habeas corpus	Latin	(Latin “You should have the body”) protection against unlawful imprisonment.	
halal	Arabic	Meat slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law (Arabic “lawful”).	
hoi polloi	Greek GR	Rabble, plebs, the masses	Mixing with the hoi polloi is seen as mixing with people below your social status, the opposite of “hobnobbing” with people above your social status.
in flagrante delicto	Latin	Caught in the act (Latin “with the crime still blazing”).	

in loco parentis	Latin	A guardian, in place of a parent.	
in vino veritas	Latin	Truth is in wine.	
ipso facto	Latin	<i>By the fact itself.</i> “A teacher, ipso facto, is in charge of his or her class.”	A chef, <i>ipso facto</i> , is in charge of a kitchen.
joie de vivre	French FR	Joy of life.	
kamikaze	Japanese JP	From Japanese “divine wind”, referring to a typhoon which dispersed a Mongol invasion fleet in 1281.	Towards the end of WWII Japanese <i>kamikaze</i> pilots launched suicide attacks on enemy ships. It’s one of only a few common foreign words of Japanese origin used in English.
karaoke	Japanese JP	From Japanese “empty orchestra”. today meaning singing to a backing track in Karaoke bars and pubs.	Karaoke is one of the most common foreign words, of Japanese origin, used in English.
ketchup / catchup	Chinese CN	Originally a pickled fish sauce with spices and brine. Spelling adapted from Amoy dialect kôe-chiap / kê-chiap (鮭汁)	Ketchup reached the west via Malaysia and Singapore to England where ketchup recipes were mushroom based, then later tomato and spread to the USA via settlers.
kitsch	German DE	Rubbish, bad taste.	Ironically kitsch can be so bad it’s good. Kitsch is in the eye of the beholder.
la dolce vita	Italian IT	The good life.	Title of several films, songs and a perfume by <u>Christian Dior</u> , one of the best known and used foreign phrases used in English.
laissez faire	French FR	Policy of non interference.	
lingua franca	Italian IT	Common language.	
macho	Spanish ES	Arrogant masculine man (Spanish/Portuguese machismo “manly”).	Randy Savage and the Village People spring to mind.
mea culpa	Latin	My fault.	
modus operandi	Latin	Method of procedure, method of operating (commonly abbreviated to M.O.).	The suspect followed the same M.O.
moped	Swedish SE	(Swedish motor och pedaler “pedal cycle with engine and wheels”)	One of only a handful of common foreign words from Swedish.
noblesse oblige	French FR	Nobility obliges.	
nom de plume	French FR	Pen name.	Commonly used by writers to preserve their anonymity.
non sequitur	Latin	Something that doesn’t follow on logically.	
objet d’art	French FR	Literally “art object” in French.	An objet d’art is used in English to describe a small three-dimensional work with some artistic value.
off-piste	French FR	Skiing in areas unprepared for skiing. Off the beaten track.	One of the common foreign words that make English fun. Used to describe actors and politicians who do not follow to their scripts or anything unexpected.
pandemic	Greek GR	From Greek “pandemos” meaning “all the people”.	Sadly Covid-19 made ADDucation’s list of the <u>worst global pandemics in history</u> during 2020. Pandemic became

			one of the most common foreign words worldwide.
persona non grata	Latin	Unwelcome or unacceptable person.	Sally was a <i>persona non grata</i> in our club because she wouldn't follow the rules.
piece de résistance	French FR	Special food dish or outstanding item or event.	
poltergeist	German DE	A ghost that moves objects around or causes loud noises (German "noisy ghost").	
prima donna	Latin	A temperamental and conceited person.	Sophie found it hard to make friends because she was considered to a <i>prima donna</i> .
prima facie	Latin	At first view.	
pro bono	Latin	Donated or done without charge.	The lawyer took the case on a <i>pro bono</i> basis.
pro forma	Latin	Done for the sake of form.	
pro rata	Latin	Proportionally according to a factor.	
pro tempore	Latin	For the time being.	
punch	Hindi	Originally "paantsch" an alcoholic drink made of five ingredients; sugar, lemon, alcohol, water, spices or tea.	Punch is a popular party drink served from a large punch bowl.
pundit	Hindi	An expert, critic or commentator on a specific subject.	Punditry, by pundits, analyze sports, express opinions in the media, critique theater, food etc.
Que sera, sera	Spanish ES Italian IT	Whatever will be, will be.	Spanish-like but also from Italian, both in 16th century. Made popular by <u>Doris Day</u> in the 1956 Alfred Hitchcock film "The Man Who Knew Too Much".
quid pro quo	Latin	Something for something else, often a fair exchange, sometimes used in sexual harassment cases.	Ron gave me his candy bar as <i>quid pro quo</i> for my soft drink.
quod erat demonstratum	Latin	As demonstrated ("Q.E.D.").	
raison d'être	French FR	Reason for being.	
rendezvous	French FR	Agree to meet, meeting.	
safari	Swahili	A journey, expedition.	
saffron	Arabic	A spice, originally from "za'farān" then later old french "safran".	Saffron is the most expensive spice and food on Earth – but a little goes a long way.
salaam	Arabic	Peace from (al)-salām.	Salaam alei-kum "peace be upon you" is a greeting used by Muslims.
sang froid	French FR	Cold blood.	
savoir-faire	French FR	Knowledge of what to do.	
schadenfreude	German DE	Taking pleasure at someone else's misfortune.	
shampoo	Hindi	Massage, rub (Hindustani "chāmpo" to press).	Humans, animals, cars and furniture can all be shampooed. One of the most common foreign words of Hindi origin used in English.
sine qua non	Latin	Indispensable (Latin "without which not").	

smorgasbord	Swedish SE	Sandwich or buffet with variety of dishes or situation with many choices.	See also moped and gauntlet.
soupçon	French FR	Hint of (French “suspicion”).	
status quo	Latin	Existing state or condition.	Hannah didn't like change and preferred to maintain the <i>status quo</i> . Also a famous rock band.
tempus fugit	Latin	Time flies.	
tête-à-tête	French FR	A private conversation (French “head to head”).	
tour de force	French FR	A feat of strength.	
troika	Russian RU	“Troie” in Russian means “set of three” and was used to refer to politicians and administrators.	A troika is a sleigh or carriage drawn by a group of three horses harnessed abreast before being used more generally as a group of three.
<u>tsunami</u>	Japanese JP	A large tidal wave (Japanese “harbor wave”).	<u>More Japanese words used in English...</u>
tycoon	Japanese JP	Business leader (from Japanese “taikun” meaning “high commander”).	The 72 year-old tycoon was one of America's most generous philanthropists.
uber / über	German DE	Very, max, possessing property to an extreme (German “over”).	Uber has become one of the fastest growing foreign language words used in English due to the rise of the Uber brand around the world.
vendetta	Italian IT	Private revenge feud among families of murdered persons.	Vendetta is one of the most common foreign words in English of Italian origin.
veni, vidi, vici	Latin	I came, I saw, I conquered.	
verboten	German DE	Forbidden.	
vis-à-vis	French FR	As compared with	
wunderkind	German DE	Boy wonder from the German “wonder child”.	A boy succeeding at an early age could be a wunderkind.
zeitgeist	German DE	Spirit of the times.	2020 zeitgeist words; pandemic, lockdown, furlough, environment.