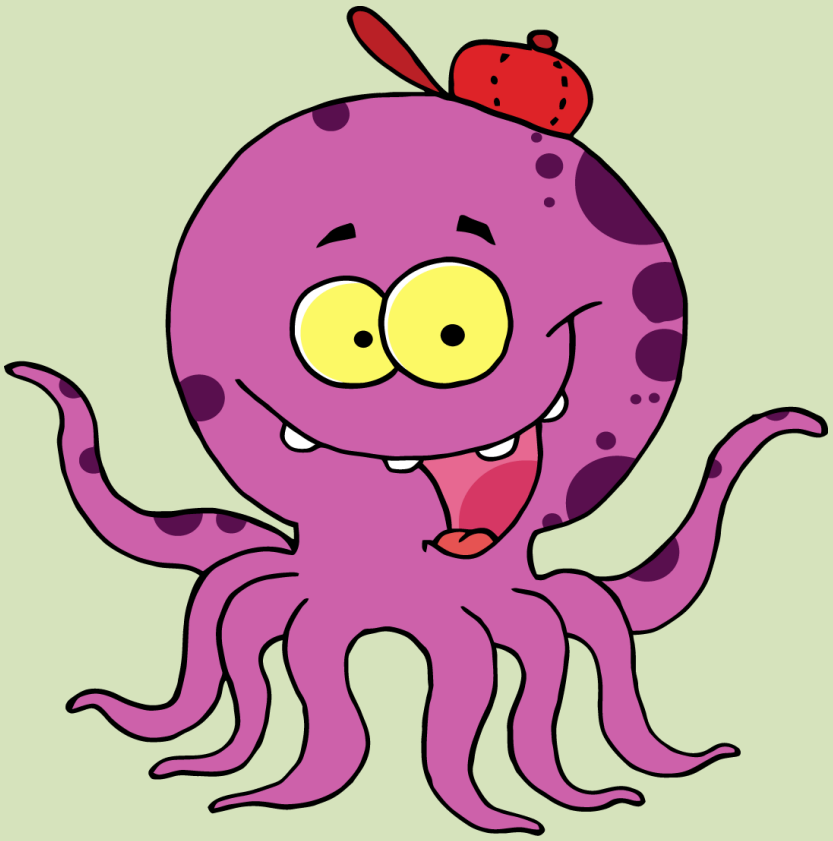
A Study of Common

Greek and Latin Base Words

That Live in Our Language
as

Disguised Digits



A Three-part Lesson with Answer Keys
by Margaret Whisnant

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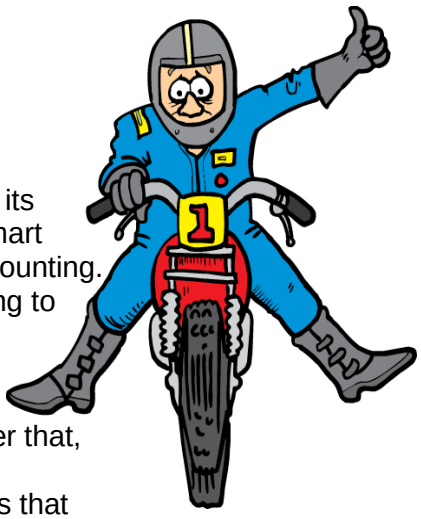
Disguised Digits

One—Two—Three

Introduction



Most numbers hang out in plain sight—0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. No doubt about it. These distinctive shapes are our numbers.

Known as Arabic numerals, this handy set of ten digits can trace its origin back hundreds of years to ancient India where some really smart mathematician came up with the idea of using special symbols for counting. Persians living in the country liked them, and they passed them along to other Arabs who lived farther west.

Over the years, these versatile little figures were adopted by the people of North Africa. Then during the Middle Ages (1000-1500) Europeans took them from their North African home to Europe. After that, their emigration to North America was inevitable.

What goes unnoticed by many people, however, are the numbers that live among us hidden in our **vocabulary**. These counting devices, every bit as old as Arabic numerals, are descendants of words spoken by the citizens of ancient Greece and Rome. (The Greeks, by the way, spoke Greek, but the Romans spoke Latin.)

The Greeks built their civilization and their language first. The Romans, who came later, admired the Greeks, so they stole a bunch of their ideas, including their words, and they never gave them back. That's why many of our hidden counting terms have roots in both Greek and Latin.

Long ago, these words left their ancient homes to travel the long and winding path that brought them into the English language where they now live and work as **word parts**. Though their identity as counting devices is disguised, they are easy to spot once you know their secrets.

Take a look at these three familiar terms:

unicycle **bi**cycle **tri**cycle

You probably already know that a unicycle has **one** wheel, a bicycle has **two** wheels, and a tricycle has **three.** But did you know that in these three words, and in many others, the Latin word part **uni—** means *one*, **bi—** means *two*, and **tri—** means *three*?

Quick, how many horns did the dinosaur ***tri****ceratops* have sticking out of its head? Get it? Just too easy, isn't it? How about a challenge?

Following are sets of definitions or other clues to help you identify a whole bunch of English words that count **one, two, three** without using Arabic numbers. The targeted Greek and Latin word parts are written in bold print before each set. Use a dictionary or the internet to identify unfamiliar words and to check your spelling. Fill in the missing letters and unmask each word with a disguised digit!

uni- *one*

u n i __ __ __ __

1. This mythical animal, which resembles a horse, has one horn in the middle of its forehead.

u n i f __ __ __

2. Identifying outfits of **one** style worn by members of a particular profession, organization, rank, etc.; identical or consistent; the same.

u __ **i** __

3. A single thing or person; any group of things or people regarded as one; a single part of a group or a whole.

u n i __ __ __

4. Because they have joined together to form **one** nation, our group of fifty individual states can correctly be called the _____ States of America.

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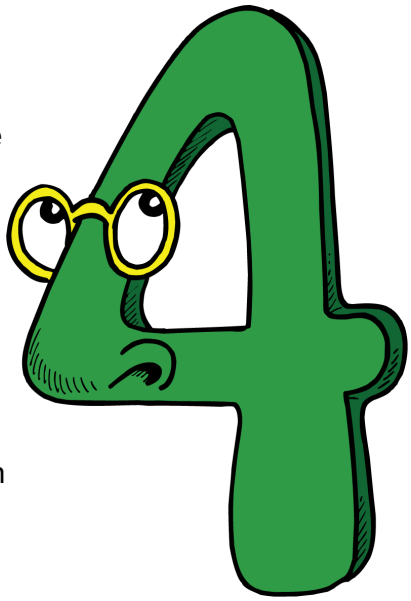
More Disguised Digits

Four and More



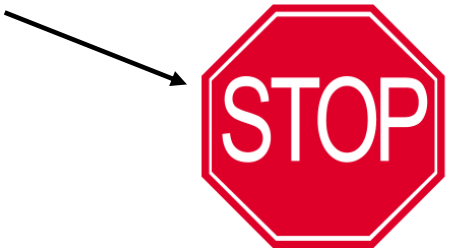
One (***uni—***), two (***bi—***), and three (***tri—***), as you probably have already surmised, are not the only digits living incognito in our vocabulary. There are quite a few others.

Some of them don't do much work. ***Novem—***, for example, the Latin word for *nine**,*** shows up in **Novem**ber (the *ninth* month on the *Roman* calendar), but practically nowhere else.

Another slacker is ***quint—*,** the base word for *five.* It's good for identifying **quint**uplets, a set of five babies arriving at the same time to one mother, and a **quint**et, a group of five singers. You can find *quint—* in a few more words, but they are not every-day useful.

Other Greek and Latin counting words work harder, and they do it right before our very eyes.

Need proof? Okay, let's start with the number **8.** It's hidden in this familiar object. See it?



If you answered *Yes,* then you know a stop sign is an ***octa****gon***,** a figure with *eight* sides. The word part ***octa— (***also spelled ***octo—***) is the Latin word for **eight**.

So, what is unique about an ***octo****pus?*

Hold on! You can answer that question and a few more by studying the following definitions and descriptions for other disguised-digit words . The targeted Greek and Latin word parts are written in bold print before each group. Use a dictionary or the internet to identify unfamiliar words and to check your spelling before you fill in the missing letters.

quad— (quart—) *four* or ¼
pent—*five* sex—*six* *octo*— (octa—) *eight*

q u a __ __ __ __	1. This coin is **one forth** of a dollar.
q u __ __ **t** __ __	2. A group of **four** singers or players; any group of four persons or things.
o c t __ __ __ __	3 A marine animal having a soft, oval body and **eight** sucker-bearing arms and living mostly at the bottom of the sea.
q u a __ __ __ __ **g l e**	4. A plane figure having **four** angles and **four** sides, such as a square; a rectangular area surrounded on all **four** sides by buildings, such as on a college campus.
p e n __ __ __ __ **n**	5. A plane figure having **five** angles and **five** sides; *Capitalized,* a building in Arlington, Virginia, with an architectural design of **five** sides, where most U.S. Defense Department offices are located.

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