

## Chapter 169: prerogative–prevaricate

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**prerogative** (pri-ROG-ə-tiv) *n.* A *prerogative* is an exclusive right, power, or privilege (to decide, judge, make rules, etc., or to behave in a certain way) granted a particular person by virtue of his position, office, rank, title, etc. (as in *the prerogative of a school principal to suspend a student or the prerogative of a parent to set a bedtime*). In 1987 the London Times said that it is the “*prerogative of [a politician’s] wife to cough noisily when [her husband] goes on too long at the [speaker’s platform]*.”

**presage** (PRES-ij) *vb., n.* To *presage* is to foreshadow (indicate or suggest beforehand) or foretell (predict), as in *dark clouds presaged the downpour. The emotional intensity of (19th century German composer) Robert Schumann’s orchestral works presaged his later nervous breakdown*. As a noun, a *presage* is something that foreshadows or foretells.

**prescient** (PRĒ-shē-ənt, PRĒ-shənt, PRESH-ē-ənt, PRESH-ənt) *adj.* If you’re *prescient*, you have foresight; you have knowledge of things before they happen. The word can refer to either a supernatural foreknowing (as in *fortunetellers in fairy tales are prescient about future events*) or to a natural foresight (as in *a good financial advisor is prescient about coming stock market trends*). The noun is *prescience*. *Jules Verne’s prescient 19th-century science fiction novels anticipated many aspects of 20th-century technology*.

**presentiment** (pri-ZEN-tə-mənt) *n.* A *presentiment* is a feeling or sense that something (often, but not always, something bad) is about to happen. *In the Bible, the Queen of Sheba (the ruler of an ancient Arabian country) tells (ancient Israel’s) King Solomon that she has a presentiment that Jesus will be nailed to the True Cross (sacred wood that was originally a branch of the Tree of Knowledge)*.

**prestige** (pre-STĒZH) *n.* *Prestige* refers to someone or something’s high standing or importance among others (as in *a position of great prestige*), or to the level of respect at which someone or something is regarded by others, whether high or not (as in *his prestige rose when he was elected class president*). The adjective is *prestigious*, which means “having a high reputation” (as in *the Oscar is the film industry’s most prestigious award*). In August 1980, speaking of office workers, the New York Times said that “*windows [in one’s office] are as essential to prestige as Christmas is to retailing*.”

**presumptuous** (pri-ZUMP-choo-əs) *adj.* If you’re *presumptuous*, you’re overly or unwarrantedly bold or forward; you go beyond what is proper or right; you’re overconfident, uppity, brash, arrogant, rude, etc. *In the Bible, when Noah’s descendants (who spoke one language) tried to build a tower (the Tower of Babel) reaching to Heaven, God, thinking this presumptuous, stopped them by making them speak in different languages (so they couldn’t communicate intelligently with each other)*.

**pretentious** (pri-TEN-shəs) *adj.* People who are *pretentious* act more important, dignified, or distinguished than they really are; they’re snobbish, stuck up. Places that are *pretentious* are outwardly showy. Writing or speech that’s *pretentious* is overdone, flamboyant, formal. (Note the similarity of this word to the word *pretend*. In all these senses, someone or something is pretending to be better than it really is.) The noun is *pretension*. *In her 1976 autobiography, British ballerina Dame Margot Fonteyn said, “Great artists are people who find the way to be themselves in their art; any sort of pretension induces mediocrity in art and life alike.”*

**preternatural** (prē-tər-NACH-ər-əl, prē-tər-NACH-rəl) *adj.* Things that are *preternatural* are beyond the normal course of nature; they’re otherworldly, unearthly, supernatural, irregular, strange, extraordinary, etc. *In his 1986 biography of television pioneer and NBC founder David Sarnoff (1891–1971), Kenneth Bilby said, “[He] had come to view [television] as a force of nearly preternatural dimensions, life-transforming in its impact.”*

**pretext** (PRĒ-tekst) *n.* A *pretext* is a false reason (or purpose, motive, appearance, etc.) put forward to conceal a real reason (or intention, condition, etc.); a misleading excuse. *In 1774 French philosopher Denis Diderot said, “Disturbances in society are never more fearful than when those who are stirring up the trouble can use the pretext of religion to mask their true designs.”*

**prevail** (pri-VĀL) *vb.* If one thing *prevails over* another, it's more powerful, influential, or significant (than the other). *During the War of 1812, American warships frequently prevailed over British vessels.* If someone *prevails on* (or *upon*) another, he influences or moves the other to do or accept something. *In 1939 a group of scientists who had received evidence that the Nazis were planning to build an atomic bomb to use against the U.S. prevailed upon physicist Albert Einstein to write to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and urge that the United States develop one first.* If someone or something simply *prevails* (without a following preposition), then, depending on the context, it (1) achieves success; wins (as in *the Yankees prevailed*), (2) is widespread or current (as in *the prevailing viewpoint*), or (3) appears as the most important or frequent feature of something (as in *a painting in which greens prevail*).

**prevalent** (PREV-ə-lənt) *adj.* If you say that something (a belief, a disease, a type of plant, a style, a method of doing something, etc.) is *prevalent*, you mean that it's generally or widely occurring, existing, accepted, or practiced; it's widespread, usual, common, etc. *Magnolia trees are prevalent in Mississippi; in fact, the state nickname is the Magnolia State, the state tree is the magnolia tree, and the state flower is the magnolia blossom.*

**prevaricate** (pri-VAR-i-kāt) *vb.* To *prevaricate* is to lie, evade the truth, speak misleadingly, deliberately create an incorrect impression, etc. The noun *prevarication* is the act of *prevaricating*. *When President Bill Clinton lied about his sexual misdeeds, some people defended him, claiming that because the issues were personal (and therefore "nobody's business"), his prevarication was understandable and forgivable.*

## Word Games

I. Match the correct definition to each of the following numbered words.

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|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. prescient     | a. having foresight       |
| 2. presumptuous  | b. supernatural           |
| 3. preternatural | c. overly bold or forward |

II. Does the definition fit the word? Answer yes or no.

<u>Word</u>	<u>Yes or No</u>	<u>Definition</u>
1. pretentious	_____	difficult to understand
2. presentiment	_____	a feeling that something is about to happen
3. presage	_____	straighten, line up

III. Use the following words to fill in the blanks in the sentences below:

*prerogative, prestige, pretext*

- A degree from Harvard University carries great \_\_\_\_\_.
- The embittered employees absented themselves from work on the \_\_\_\_\_ of illness.
- It is the \_\_\_\_\_ of a presidential nominee to choose a running mate.

IV. Are the two words on each line similar or opposite? Circle one of the two initials.

- |                |     |        |
|----------------|-----|--------|
| 1. prevalent   | s o | scarce |
| 2. prevail     | s o | lose   |
| 3. prevaricate | s o | lie    |