

# The Etymology of “GRACIAS”

*Etymology* is studying where words come from. Some words have extremely long histories and passed through many, many languages and forms to arrive in use today. Let’s look at where the word *gracias* and its origin.



*Gracias* (“thank you”) is merely the plural of *gracia*.

TASK #1: Use the rough meanings above to speculate about why *thank you* is expressed with *gracias*. Because you are just creating a theory or hypothesis without studied and tested evidence, your answers may not match other people’s. That’s okay!

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TASK #2: The English word *grace* and the Spanish word *gracia* are known as *cognates*. Cognates are words in different languages that come from the same original “parent” word. In the case of cognates in English and Spanish, it’s usually a Latin word that came into English via French.

Frequently cognates have similar meanings with slight differences in use or with added shades of meaning. An example is how the Spanish word *gracia* can mean “a joke.” If you tell a joke with ease, grace, and flair, it’s really funny and makes everyone laugh, but we wouldn’t use the word *grace* to express *joke* in English no matter how well it was told. The closest we might get would be saying something like, “Wow, you told that joke gracefully.”

Can you match up the English and Spanish cognates? Every single one of them comes from the word *gratus* either directly from Latin or, in the case of the English words, via French first.

ENGLISH WORDS

SPANISH WORDS

- |                    |             |
|--------------------|-------------|
| ingrate 1. ____    | a) gracia   |
| gratitude 2. ____  | b) gracioso |
| grace 3. ____      | c) gratis   |
| gratuitous 4. ____ | d) ingrato  |
| graceful 5. ____   | e) gratitud |
| gratis 6. ____     | f) gratuito |

Task #3: Fill in the blanks with English words that come from the Latin word *gratus*.

1. We're ready to eat. Who wants to say \_\_\_\_\_?
2. The way the dancers move their bodies is so \_\_\_\_\_.
3. We're just going to have to \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ since we can't seem to reach a compromise.
4. \_\_\_\_\_! You are a winner!
5. It was such a scandal. He ended up leaving the company in \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The tickets were \_\_\_\_\_. We didn't have to pay anything!
7. I spent all afternoon helping her and not once did she say "thank you." She's such an \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Many people keep a journal where they write things they are \_\_\_\_\_ for each day. They call it a \_\_\_\_\_ journal.

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## ANSWERS AND ADDITIONAL IDEAS

TASK #1: Remember that answers may vary—the purpose of this question isn’t to come up with the “correct” answer...it’s to build your own mental connections between “gracia / gracias” and the word “thank you.” You might have written something like:

- When something pleasing / agreeable is given to us, we want to say thank you.
- “Thank you” recognizes that something is pleasing and was given out of good will.
- When something nice happens, we can recognize it as God’s grace acting in the world so we say “gracias.”

TASK #2:

### ENGLISH WORDS

- ingrate 1. d
- gratitude 2. e
- grace 3. a
- gratuitous 4. f
- graceful 5. b
- gratis 6. c

### SPANISH WORDS

- a) gracia
- b) gracioso
- c) gratis
- d) ingrato
- e) gratitud
- f) gratuito

TASK #3:

- 1) grace
- 2) graceful
- 3) agree, disagree
- 4) congratulations
- 5) disgrace
- 6) gratis
- 7) ingrate
- 8) grateful, gratitude

### OTHER IDEAS:

- To build connections with history, use a dictionary that includes basic etymological information and see when various derivatives of *gratus* were first used. If you have a timeline in progress, add the words to your timeline.
- Consider looking up the etymology of *paciencia*, another cognate.