



An Encyclopædia Britannica Company

Join Us On

Dictionary | Thesaurus | Medical | Scrabble® | Spanish Central

retain



SEARCH >



Games



Word of the Day



Video



Blog: Words at Play



My Faves

Test Your Vocabulary!



TAKE THE QUIZ >

Dictionary

SAVE

POPULARITY



to keep (something) in a position, job, etc. **Fun, Funner, Funnest**
: to pay for the work of (a person or business)

17 of the finest words for drinking >

Full Definition of RETAIN

transitive verb

- 1 **a** : to keep in possession or use
b : to keep in one's pay or service; *specifically* : to employ by paying a **retainer**
c : to keep in mind or memory : **REMEMBER**
- 2 : to hold secure or intact

See [retain](#) defined for English-language learners >

See [retain](#) defined for kids >

Examples of RETAIN

- A landlord may *retain* part of your deposit if you break the lease.
- They insisted on *retaining* old customs.
- You will *retain* your rights as a citizen.
- The TV show has *retained* its popularity for many years.
- The company's goal is to attract and *retain* good employees.
- The team failed to *retain* him, and he became a free agent.
- They have decided to *retain* a firm to conduct a survey.
- You may need to *retain* an attorney.

Origin of RETAIN

Middle English *reteinen*, *retainen*, from Anglo-French *retenir*, *reteigner*, from

Words at Play



Latin Words to Live By ("Love Conquers All" & More)



Drones Are Everywhere Now

Word of the Day

MAY 07, 2015

virtuoso

a person skilled in the fine arts

Get the Word of the Day direct to your inbox — subscribe today!

SUBSCRIBE >

Word Games

Take a 3-minute break and test your skills!

Name That Thing



True or False?



Spell It



Latin *retinĕre* to hold back, restrain, from *re-* + *tenĕre* to hold — more at



10 Charming Words for Nasty People

Put-downs with flair

Learn More »



Related to RETAIN

When "Literally" isn't well,

Synonyms: **literal**
hold, reserve, keep, withhold
How to use a word that (literally) drives some people nuts.
Antonyms: give up, hand over, release, relinquish, surrender, yield

[+] more

See Synonym Discussion at KEEP



Know what this is?

Test your vocab with our fun, fast game

Go Play »



Depraved-Heart

Murder

Six police officers charged in the death of Freddie Grey ... Ailurophobia, and 9 other unusual fears

Learn More »

Rhymes with RETAIN

abstain, again, air lane, airplane, amain, arcane, arraign, attain, Bahrain, Bassein, Beltane, biplane, birdbrain, block plane, bloodstain...

[+] more

Join Us



Merriam-Webster on Facebook »



Merriam-Webster on Twitter »

retain

transitive verb | re-tain | ri-'tān (Medical Dictionary)

Medical Definition of RETAIN

- 1 : to hold or keep in mind or memory
- 2 : to keep in mind or memory

© 2015 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated

Learn More About RETAIN

[Browse the Dictionary](#) • [Browse the Thesaurus](#) • [Browse the Spanish-English Dictionary](#) • [Browse the Medical Dictionary](#)

Thesaurus: All synonyms and antonyms for "retain"
Spanish Central: Spanish translation of "retain"
SCRABBLE®: Playable words you can make from "retain"

Browse

Next Word in the Dictionary: [retained income](#)
Previous Word in the Dictionary: [retail store](#)
All Words Near: [retain](#)

Ask The Editor Videos

Seen & Heard

What made you want to look up *retain*? Please tell us where you read or heard it (including the quote, if possible).

12 comments



Add a comment...

Also post on Facebook

Posting as **Chris Tighe** ▾

Comment

billy.bass68 (signed in using yahoo)

Trying to determine if retains means to keep something you have or add something you want to keep

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · February 2 at 10:35am



Arie Beamon

This helped so much.I needed help trying figure out a word an website helped me.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · January 26 at 2:24pm



Star Boy Prince · [Follow](#) · Traditional Karate Academy

i,m starting to get to love classified hard to understand

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · March 9, 2014 at 12:42pm



Ric Dzula · Works at Bullitt County Public Schools

On an application for a professional certificate...for one of the documents it says to "retain the original," and I wasn't sure if that meant to keep it or send it in. I guess I keep it. :)

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · May 11, 2013 at 12:14pm



Teri Simpson · Portland, Oregon

Thank you soooooooooooooo much.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · April 15, 2013 at 8:58pm

[View 6 more](#)

Facebook social plugin

[View Seen & Heard Highlights from Around the Site >](#)