
greatly

ADVERB

Etymology

Summary

Formed within English, by derivation.

Etymons: *great* *adj.*, *-ly* *suffix*².

< *great* *adj.* + *-ly* *suffix*².

Compare **Middle Dutch** *grotelike* in a great degree, much, very, enthusiastically, heartily, grandly (**Dutch** *grootelijks* grandly, splendidly, in a great degree, highly, very, powerfully), **Middle Low German** *grōtlīk*, *grōtlīke*, *grōtlīken*, *grōtelīk*, *grōtelīken* very, strongly, highly, grandly, **Middle High German** *grōzlīche*, *grōzlīche*, *grōzlīchen*, *grōzlīchen* very, highly (**German** *grösslich* very, much, extremely, to a great degree).

Notes

In quotes. 1531 and 1535 at *sense 1c* perhaps after **German** *vil-*, intensifying prefix (see *fele adv.*): Isaiah 62:14 and 32:12, the passages translated in these quotes., have *die vilbewonten stett* and *die vilbesuochten statt* in Zwingli's **German** translation of the Bible (a1531), whereas the **English** adverb has no equivalent in the **Latin** Vulgate, the **Hebrew** original, or Luther's **German** translation.

Meaning & use

1. To a great extent, in a great degree; extensively, exceedingly; highly; much, very.

1.a. Modifying verbs and participles.

a1200-

to set greatly by: see [set v.¹](#) VII.91e.

- a1200** Gef man haueð to done mid his rihte spuse on unsele..he sinegeð gretliche.
MS Trinity Cambridge in R. Morris, *Old English Homilies* (1873) 2nd Series 13 (Middle English Dictionary)
- ?c1225** & þe ancre legge oneiðer sumpenitance Mare up on þilke þe gretluket gulte.
(?a1200) *Ancrene Riwe* (Cleopatra MS. C.vi) (1972) 313
- c1330** So gretliche sche awondred was þat hir chaunged blod and fas.
(?a1300) *Arthur & Merlin* (Auchinleck MS.) (1973) l. 1137
- 1340** Ne weneþ naȝt gratliche zeneȝy.
Ayenbite (1866) 47
- c1405** I kan nat se þ^f it myghte greetly harme me, thogh I tooke vengeance.
(c1390) G. Chaucer, *Melibeus* (Hengwrt MS.) (2003) §577
- c1450** Pou has giltid, but noȝt gretly.
(?a1400) *Wars of Alexander* (Ashmole MS.) l. 472
- 1484** I thanke the gretely.
W. Caxton, translation of *Subtyl Historyes & Fables of Esope* iii. ii. f. lv
- 1525** That he had many of his men slayne, and that the batayle had cost hym greatly.
Lord Berners, translation of J. Froissart, *Cronycles* vol. II. ccxvii. [ccxiii.] 671
- 1590** He..Greatly shunned manly exercise.
E. Spenser, *Faerie Queene* i.iv. sig. D2^v
- 1607** He that first stird in the Churches cause, Against him greatliest that oppugned it.
M. Drayton, *Legend of Cromwel* 28
- a1616** To heare musique, the Generall does not greatly care.
W. Shakespeare, *Othello* (1622) iii. i. 17
- 1665** Such as have lived long in Universities do greatly affect words and expressions no where in use besides.

J. Evelyn, *Letter* 20 June in *Mem.* (1818) vol. II. ii. 204

1745 They, first, Themselves offend, who **greatly** please.

E. Young, *Complaint: Night the Eighth* 39

1756 The bark is **greatly** esteemed among the tanners.

P. Browne, *Civil & Natural History of Jamaica* ii. ii. 221

1849 Gigantic shrubs, **greatly** resembling our English yew.

E. E. Napier, *Excursions in Southern Africa* vol. II. 287

1871 I should **greatly** prefer a real friend to all the gold of Darius.

B. Jowett, translation of Plato, *Dialogues* vol. I. 53

1926 When Vernon did not return he had not concerned himself **greatly**, for the affairs of his master were no business of his.

J. Buchan, *Dancing Floor* xvi. 277

1967 I am one of the few who have never been **greatly** tempted in that direction.

G. Greene, *May we borrow your Husband?* 157

2001 His adventuresome, knockabout background.. **greatly** impressed the unworldly van Gogh.

Smithsonian December 52/2

1.b. Modifying non-participial adjectives, prepositional phrases, and other adverbials.

a1375-

greatly to the credit of: see [credit n. 1.7a.i.](#)

α1375 Pan was þemperour **greteli** glad.

(c1350) *William of Palerne* (1867) l. 1292

α1400 Sco was **gretli** in dute.

(α1325) *Cursor Mundi* (Vespasian MS.) l. 11634

?α1475 Aʒens god þou dost **grettly** amys.

Ludus Coventriae (1922) 56

α1500 The Emperour grauntid that peticion for lost of observaunce of the lawe, but hit was **gretly** ayenste his herte.

(?α1450) *Gesta Romanorum* (Harley MS. 7333) (1879) 154

- 1579** To the ende that euery man may..be **greatly** afraide.
L. Tomson, translation of J. Calvin, *Sermons Epistles of S. Paule to Timothie & Titus* 548/1
- 1686** His long experience in Affairs rendered him **greatly** considerable.
translation of J. Chardin, *Coronation Solyman* 16 in *Travels Persia*
- 1691** Lead-sheathing **greatly** cheaper than that of Wood.
T. Hale, *Account of New Inventions* 12
- 1749** I..think it an ornament **greatly** in taste.
Lady Luxborough, *Letter* 28 December in *Letters to William Shenstone* (1775) 179
- 1768** I shall show that it is **greatly** probable.
H. Walpole, *Historic Doubts* 70
- 1817** All the names of excellence..are **greatly** too mean to declare the Saviour's worth.
A. Bonar, *Sermon* vol. II. xv. 318
- 1824** Here the bow is **greatly** a better weapon than the musket.
W. S. Landor, *Works* (1846) vol. I. 183/2
- 1856** The skate and dog fish are **greatly** less rare.
H. Miller, *Testimony of Rocks* (1857) i. 66
- 1873** Her mother and brother were **greatly** proud of her.
J. Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera* (1896) vol. II. xxx. 131
- 1886** Careless and lazy is he, **Greatly** inferior to Me.
R. Kipling, *Departmental Ditties* 12
- 1908** Mr. Wilbur Wright is busy experimenting with his **greatly** successful bi-plane.
Westminster Gazette 14 August 10/2
- 1945** Wall plaques, picture frames, coat hangers and other articles of use around the home are **greatly** in demand.
Popular Mechanics August 104/2
- 1979** Subjects have experiences which are related to ordinary remembering but of a **greatly** more vivid nature.
T. Honderich in T. Honderich & M. Burnyeat, *Philos. as it Is* 251
- 2011** Drusilla was slightly enterprising, not **greatly** desirous and ambitious.
C. Moir, *Saltbox* v. 26

- 1531** Thow shalt be called the **gretely** haunted populose cyte and thou shalt nomore be called the forsaken.
G. Joye, translation of *Prophete Isaye* lxii. sig. P.ii
- 1535** The palaces..shalbe broken, and the **greatly** occupide cities desolate.
Bible (Coverdale) Isaiah xxxii. C
- 1603** In a little, but I may say, a **greatly** blessed llande.
N. Breton, *Dialogue Pithe & Pleasure* sig. C3^v
- 1684** Vomitories are very profitable, as being a **greatly** revelling medicine.
translation of T. Bonet, *Guide to Practical Physician* xi. 379
- 1727** Its rarifying power then ceasing, the **greatly** rarified sap, and air mixt with it, will condense.
S. Hales, *Vegetable Staticks* 138
- 1764** Whatever saccharine particles touch the **greatly**-heated boiler are turned black.
Museum Rusticum vol. 2 iii. 17
- 1817** Giovanni..was lending all the powers of his **greatly**-gifted mind to strengthen the different fortresses round the two ports.
A. M. Porter, *Knight of St. John* vol. II. xiii. 282
- 1875** Their **greatly** varying dialects are polysyllabic and agglutinative.
W. D. Whitney, *Life & Growth of Language* xii. 244
- 1920** The **greatly** admired photograph that shows him in his boat rowing onward, onward, alone.
Guide to Nature December 114/1
- 1969** An important organizational shift occurred with the **greatly** increasing employment of unskilled laborers.
H. Holborn, *Hist. Modern Germany 1840-1945* ii. vii. 359
- 2005** He argued in the class debate about art, about how cinema was a **greatly** misunderstood art form.
A. Smith, *Accidental* 239

Ayenbite (1866) 156

1540 If I shulde say it moste **greatly** .i. yf I shulde say it and swaere it neuer so moche, or neuer so fast, yet no man wolde beleue it.

J. Palsgrave, translation of G. Gnapheus, *Comedye of Acolastus* sig. liiv^v

a1916 I, who am about to pass out of the light of day forever, would like to pass with the wonder-voice of the Red One singing **greatly** in my ears.

J. London, *Red One in Red One* (1918) 47

poetic and literary

3. In a great manner: (a) magnanimously, nobly, grandly; (b) eminently, illustriously; (c) with brilliant success, very well **a1400-** indeed. Now *literary*.

a1400 Oure lord **gretly** dyde with us [Latin *magnificavit..facere*], we been maad ioyful.

Prymer (St. John's Cambridge MS.) (1891) 44

1435 Hermetis lyffe þerfore is grett, if it **gretely** be done.

R. Misyn, translation of R. Rolle, *Fire of Love* 30

c1450 So itt was **gretly** spoken of theym that faght the beste and gave the grettest strokes.

King Ponthus (Digby MS.) in *Publications of Modern Language Association of America* (1897) vol. 12 31 (Middle English Dictionary)

1587 The lewes had leaue to buyld it [sc. the Temple] again, specially vnder the Emperour Iulian..who of his owne purse gaue **greatly** to the building thereof.

Sir P. Sidney & A. Golding, translation of P. de Mornay, *Trewnesse of Christian Religion* xxix. 532

a1616 Small time: but in that small, most **greatly** liued This Starre of England.

W. Shakespeare, *Henry V* (1623) Epilogue 5

1672 It is for you, brave Man..Greatly to speake, and yet more **greatly** do.

J. Dryden, *Conquest of Granada* i.v. i. 58

1713 The brave youth..Who **greatly** in his country's cause expired.

J. Addison, *Cato* iv. iv

1725 What he **greatly** thought, he nobly dar'd.

W. Broome in A. Pope et al., translation of Homer, *Odyssey* vol. I. ii. 312

- 1764** If your piece had been **greatly** receiv'd, I would have declared Sir Thomas Lofty the author; if coldly, I would have own'd it myself.
S. Foote, *Patron* iii. 70
- 1785** All were once Perfect, and all must be at length restored. So God has **greatly** purpos'd.
W. Cowper, *Task* vi. 820
- 1863** These boys became the generation of men who fought **greatly** and endured **greatly** in the last struggle of their Republic.
'G. Eliot', *Romola* vol. III. iii. 25
- 1876** It was a great theme **greatly** treated.
'Ouida', *In Winter City* viii. 238
- 1910** When he lost money at poker his brown eyes held exactly the same twinkle as when he won, and it was current among the young men that he had played **greatly** in his day.
G. Morris, *Spread Eagle* 244
- 1936** The world is far too populous and far too chaotic for any effective influence even of a great conception **greatly** expressed.
R. Aldington, *Artifex* 57
- 1987** The Imam said that Khameneh'i's first 'four years of Islamic Presidency had passed soundly, firmly, **greatly** and successfully'.
Middle East Contemporary Surv. vol. 9 429
- 1995** A compelling desire to live **greatly** and magnanimously.
H. Banerjee, *Tagores of Jorasanko* Foreword p. v

poetic and literary

4.a. On a large scale; in or by large numbers; numerously.

1579-

- 1579** There be great playnes and valleys & mountaines, being **greatly** inhabited, with Cities and townes.
J. Frampton, translation of M. Polo, *Most Noble & Famous Trauels* lxxii. 75
- 1670** Any business which is more freely managed may be **greatlier** managed than if it were more restrained.
R. Coke, *Discourse of Trade* 51
- 1792** The funeral of our Dear Sir Joshua. It will be **greatly** attended.

E. Burke, *Letter 29 February in Correspondence* (1968) vol. VII. 84

1817 India was not **greatly** inhabited in the times of Alexander.

J. Mill, *History of British India* vol. I. ii. x. 456

1914 A great deal of time..has been spent in dealing with the solution of problems in the **greatly** populated centers.

First Amer. National Fire Prevention Convent. 1913 216

2001 Revivals..were **greatly** attended because the ministers were fireballers.

D. Matthews in W. H. Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow* iii. 111

4.b. † For a great or the most part; mainly, chiefly. *Obsolete. rare.*

1742-1865

1742 They **greatly** live a life on earth Unkindled, unconceiv'd.

E. Young, *Complaint: Night the First* 7

1865 We now enter upon the second or dialectic period; passed by Plato **greatly** at Megara.

G. Grote, *Plato* vol. I. v. 178

5. In or to a high rank or position. Now *rare.*

1684-

1684 The Virgin's beautiful, and **greatly** born.

N. Lee, *Constantine* ii. 20

1768 To be **greatly** married, in point of fortune was, according to his sordid notions, to be happily married.

Summer-house vol. II. iii. i. 5

1800 I am not **greatly** born, like you.

T. Bellamy, *Beggar Boy* (1801) vol. II. 142

1816 You encourage her to expect to marry **greatly**.

J. Austen, *Emma* vol. I. viii. 134

1830 It matters not..how many ensigns shall have **greatly** risen through all the gradations of command.

T. P. Thompson in *Westminster Review* July 246

1842 You were **greatly** married—that was *my* doing.

C. S. M. Bury, *Manœuvring Mother* vol. III. 303

1911 Captain Brazenhead..was born greatly, lived greatly, loved greatly, and died greatly.
M. H. Hewlett, *Brazenhead Great* p. vi

Pronunciation

BRITISH ENGLISH

/ˈɡreɪtli/ 

GRAYT-lee

U.S. ENGLISH

/ˈɡreɪtli/ 

GRAYT-lee

Pronunciation keys

Forms

Variant forms

See **great** *adj.* and **-ly** *suffix*².

Frequency

greatly is one of the 2,000 most common words in modern written English. It is similar in frequency to words like *candidate*, *laboratory*, *score*, *soil*, and *suitable*.

It typically occurs about 40 times per million words in modern written English.

greatly is in frequency band 6, which contains words occurring between 10 and 100 times per million words in modern written English. [More about OED's frequency bands](#)

Frequency data is computed programmatically, and should be regarded as an estimate.

Frequency of *greatly, adv.*, 1750–2010

* Occurrences per million words in written English

Historical frequency series are derived from Google Books Ngrams (version 2), a data set based on the Google Books corpus of several million books printed in English between 1500 and 2010.

The overall frequency for a given word is calculated by summing frequencies for the main form of the word, any plural or inflected forms, and any major spelling variations.

For sets of homographs (distinct entries that share the same word-form, e.g. *mole*, n.¹, *mole*, n.², *mole*, n.³, etc.), we have estimated the frequency of each homograph entry as a fraction of the total Ngrams frequency for the word-form. This may result in inaccuracies.

Frequency of *greatly*, *adv.*, 2017–2023

* Occurrences per million words in written English

Modern frequency series are derived from a corpus of 20 billion words, covering the period from 2017 to the present. The corpus is mainly compiled from online news sources, and covers all major varieties of World English.

Compounds & derived words

Sort by

over-greatly, adv. a1382–1599

Too greatly; excessively.

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