



Where Did the Names Come From?



Elements all have unique names and symbols. How they got these names is sometimes quite weird and interesting. Below is a table that covers the names of a few elements from the periodic table. Use these to complete the activity on page 30 in the workbook.

	Word Origin and Language of Origin	Symbol and Origin of Symbol	Meaning of the Name or Facts About the Name
Bromine	<i>brómos</i> Greek	Br Greek: Brómos	Brómos means 'dirt or stench of he-goats'. It has a strong bleach-like smell, like that of stale urine which male goats will spray onto their beards to attract female goats.
Cobalt	<i>kobold</i> German	Ko → Co German: <i>Kobold</i>	Kobold means 'evil spirit'. Miners believed that imps called 'Kobolds' stole the silver from the mines and replaced it with cobalt. It is poisonous and troublesome as it breaks down other metals, such as silver.
Gallium	<i>gallus</i> Latin	Ga Latin: Gallus	Paul-Émile Lecoq de Boisbaudran discovered gallium. In French, lecoq means 'rooster', so he gave it the Latin name for rooster; gallus.
Gold	<i>gold</i> Anglo-Saxon	Au Latin: Aurum	Gold means 'bright yellow' and aurum means 'shining dawn'.
Iron	<i>īsern</i> Anglo-Saxon	Fe Latin: Ferrum	Īsern means 'holy metal' or 'strong metal'. It was first used by Sumerians and Egyptians who obtained it from meteorites which had fallen from the sky, as if from the Gods.
Krypton	<i>kryptos</i> Greek	Kr Greek: Kryptos	Kryptos means 'hidden one' as this gas is odourless, tasteless and colourless.
Lead	<i>lead</i> Anglo-Saxon	Pb Latin: Plumbum	Pipes used to be made from lead as it is easily shaped. This is also where the words plumber and plumbing come from.
Mercury	<i>mercurius</i> Latin	Hg Latin: Hydrargyrum	Mercury is the god of speed and messenger of the gods. <i>Hydrargyrum</i> means 'water-silver'. Mercury is a liquid and silvery coloured.
Oxygen	<i>oxy geinomai</i> Greek	O Greek: Oxy geinomai	Oxy geinomai means 'I bring forth acid' as it was believed to be an essential part of acids.
Phosphorus	<i>phosphoros</i> Greek	P Greek: Phosphoros	Phos means light and phoros means bearer. White phosphorus emits a glow when exposed to oxygen.
Potassium	<i>potassa</i> Latin	K Latin: Kalium	Pot-ash is obtained from the ashes of plants extracted in a pot. Kalium means calcined ashes. Potassium is common as a compound found in burnt plants.
Rubidium	<i>rubidus</i> Latin	Rb Latin: Rubidus	Rubidus means 'deepest red' which is the colour it shows under a spectroscope.
Thallium	<i>thallos</i> Greek	Tl Greek: Thallos	Thallos means 'green twig' which is the colour it shows under a spectroscope.
Yttrium, Terbium, Erbium & Ytterbium	<i>ytterby</i> Swedish	Y, Tb, Er, Yb Swedish: Ytterby	The mineral gadolinite was found in the Swedish village Ytterby. Gadolinite contained all four elements, so they were named after the village.
Einsteinium	<i>einstein</i> German	Es German: Einstein	Einsteinium was named to honour Albert Einstein and his contribution to Physics.
Berkelium	University of California, Berkeley Anglo-Saxon	Bk Anglo-Saxon: Berkeley	Berkelium was first observed at the University of California, Berkeley.
Argon	<i>argon</i> Greek	Ar Greek: Argon	Argon means 'inactive or slow' as it is an unreactive element.
Antimony	<i>antimonos</i> Greek	Sb Latin: Stibium	Antimonos means 'opposed to solitude' as it was believed to never exist in pure form and was always found reacted with something else. Also, from the french word anti-moine, which means 'monk killer' as it is poisonous and monks were the first chemists.