

**Empower**  
by  
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SYLLABICATION: em·pow·er

PRONUNCIATION:  ɛm-pou'ɚr

**I. TRANSITIVE VERB:** Inflected forms: **em·pow·ered, em·pow·er·ing, em·pow·ers**  
**1.** To invest with power, especially legal power or official authority. See synonyms at **authorize**. **2.** To equip or supply with an ability; enable: “Computers ... empower students to become intellectual explorers” (Edward B. Fiske, *New York Times* July 5, 1989).

**OTHER FORMS:** **em·pow' er·ment** —NOUN

**II. USAGE NOTE:** Although it is a contemporary buzzword, the word *empower* is not new, having arisen in the mid-17th century with the legalistic meaning “to invest with authority, authorize.” Shortly thereafter it began to be used with an infinitive in a more general way meaning “to enable or permit.” Both of these uses survive today but have been overpowered by the word’s use in politics and pop psychology. Its modern use originated in the civil rights movement, which sought political *empowerment* for its followers. The word was then taken up by the women’s movement, and its appeal has not flagged. Since people of all political persuasions have a need for a word that makes their constituents feel that they are or are about to become more in control of their destinies, *empower* has been adopted by conservatives as well as social reformers. It has even migrated out of the political arena into other fields. •The Usage Panel has some misgivings about this recent broadening of usage. For the Panelists, the acceptability of the verb *empower* depends on the context. Eighty percent approve of the example *We want to empower ordinary citizens*. But in contexts that are not political the Panel is markedly less enthusiastic. The sentence *Hunger and greed and then sexual zeal are felt by some to be stages of experience that empower the individual* garners approval from only 33 percent of the Panelists. The Panel may frown on this kind of psychological empowering because it resonates of the self-help movement, which is notorious for trendy coinages.

**III. “Empower” has several assumptions:**

- A. “You” are *aware* of your “social power position.”
- B. “You” *decide* to fight for an “equal social status” with the oppressed.
- C. “You” *choose* to renounce some of your power to empower “another person” different than you.
- D. “You” are *pro-active* to liberate people from several forms of oppression.

**IV. “Empower” has several implications:**

- A. *Legal*. To invest with authority. You cannot give authority to Latinos without resolving their legal immigration status.
- B. *Political*. To recognize the social Human rights. You do not enable with Human rights. A nation, a social group and a person can only recognize the universal and inalienable Human rights.
- C. *Education*. To have equal opportunities to attend college without consideration of their immigrant status.
- D. *Economic*. To receive a fair distribution of the wealth that they produce in the state and the country through better salaries, benefits, etc.
- E. *Psychological*. To liberate people with illegal immigrant status. To liberate their guilt using more appropriate words, using “undocumented immigrants” instead of “illegal aliens”. This helps to resolve their problem of low self-esteem.