

# tributary

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## English

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### Etymology

From [Middle English](#) *tributarie* (“paying tribute”), from [Latin](#) *tribūtārius*, from [tribūtum](#) (“tribute”).

### Pronunciation

- [IPA<sup>\(key\)</sup>](#): /'trɪbjʊtəri/
- [Audio \(UK\)](#) ([file](#))

### Noun

#### **tributary** (plural [tributaries](#))

- 1.
2. A natural water [stream](#) that flows into a larger river or other body of water.

Synonym: [affluent](#)

### 3. A nation, state, or other entity that pays tribute.

- c. 1599–1602, William Shakespeare, “The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke”, in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies: Published According to the True Originall Copies (First Folio)*, London: [...] Isaac Iaggard, and Ed[ward] Blount, published 1623, OCLC 606515358 (<http://worldcat.org/oclc/606515358>), [Act V, scene ii], page 259 (<https://archive.org/details/mrvwilliamshakes00shak/page/259/mode/1up>), column 2:

An earnest Coniuration from the King, / As England was his faithfull **Tributary**

### Related terms

- distributary

### Translations

#### stream which flows into a larger one

- Arabic: رَافِدٌ *m.* (rāfid)
- Belarusian: прытόк *m.* (prytók)
- Bulgarian: притóк *(bg) m.* (pritók)
- Cherokee: ᎭጀᏚ ᏫᏢ *(wigawotsihihv)*
- Chinese:

Mandarin: 支流 *(zh)* (zhīliú)

- Czech: přítok *(cs) m.*
- Danish: biflod *(da) c*
- Dutch: zijrivier *(nl) m. or f*
- Esperanto: alfluanto
- Faroese: tvørá *f*, hjáá *f*
- Finnish: sivujoki *(fi)*
- French: affluent *(fr) m.*
- German: Nebenfluss *(de) m.*, Zufluss *(de) m.*
- Hebrew: רַבֵּעַ *(he) m.* (yuvál)
- Icelandic: þverá *f*, aðrennslisá *f*
- Irish: fo-abhairn *f*, craobh-abhairn *f*
- Italian: affluente *(it) m.*, tributario *(it) m.*, immissario *(it) m.*
- Japanese: 支流 *(ja)* (しりゅう, shiryū)
- Korean: 지류 *(ko)* (jiryu)
- Latvian: ieteka *f*
- Luxembourgish: Niewefloss *m.*

- Macedonian: притока *f* (pritoka)
- Manx: crouw *f*, crouw-awin *f*, fo-hrooan *m.*
- Maori: kautawa
- Norwegian:

Bokmål: bielv *m.* or *f*, sideelv *m.* or *f*  
Nynorsk: sideelv *f*

- Polish: dopływ *(pl) m.*
- Portuguese: afluente *(pt) m.*
- Romanian: afluent *(ro) m.*
- Russian: притóк *(ru) m.* (pritók)
- Serbo-Croatian:

Cyrillic: приток *m.*, притока *f*  
Roman: pritok *(sh) m.*, pritoka *(sh) f*

- Slovak: prítok *m.*
- Slovene: pritok *m.*
- Spanish: afluente *(es) m.*
- Swedish: biflod *(sv) c*
- Thai: ลิฟต์ *(th)* (kwεε)
- Tok Pisin: hanwara
- Ukrainian: притóка *f* (pritóka)

#### nation, state etc.

- Chinese:

Mandarin: 進貢國, 进贡国  
*(jìngòngguó)*, 附庸國 *(zh)*, 附庸国 *(zh)*

- Italian: vassallo *(it) m.*
- Japanese: 属国 *(ja)* (ぞっこく, zokkoku)
- Romanian: tributar *(ro) m.*

(fùyōngguó), 屬國 (zh), 属国 (zh)  
(shūguó)

- Dutch: vazalstaat (nl) *m.*
- Finnish: vasallivaltio (fi)

- Russian: дáнник (ru) *m.* (dánnik)
- Spanish: tributario *m.*

## Adjective

**tributary** (*not comparable*)

1. Related to the paying of tribute.
2. subordinate; inferior

- 1634 October 9 (first performance), [John Milton], H[enry] Lawes, editor, *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*: [...] [Comus], London: Printed [by Augustine Matthews] for Hymphrey Robinson, [...], published 1637, OCLC 228715864 (<http://worldcat.org/oclc/228715864>); reprinted as *Comus*: [...] (Dodd, Mead & Company's Facsimile Reprints of Rare Books; Literature Series; no. I), New York, N.Y.: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1903, OCLC 1113942837 (<http://worldcat.org/oclc/1113942837>):

to grace his **tributary** gods

3. Yielding supplies of any kind; serving to form or make up, a greater object of the same kind, as a part, branch, etc.; contributing.

*The Ohio has many **tributary** streams, and is itself **tributary** to the Mississippi.*

## Related terms

- tribute

## Translations

**related to the paying of tribute**

- Finnish: suojelu- (fi)

- Italian: tributario (it) *m.*
- Spanish: tributario

**subordinate, inferior — see subordinate, inferior**

**yielding supplies of any kind**

- Finnish: tukeva (fi), avustava (fi); sivu- (fi)

- Spanish: contribuyente (es)

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This page was last edited on 14 June 2021, at 10:47.

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# Tributary

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A **tributary**<sup>[1]</sup> or **affluent**<sup>[2]</sup> is a stream or river that flows into a larger stream or main stem (or parent) river or a lake.<sup>[3]</sup> A tributary does not flow directly into a sea or ocean.<sup>[4]</sup> Tributaries and the main stem river drain the surrounding drainage basin of its surface water and groundwater, leading the water out into an ocean. The Irtysh is a chief tributary of the Ob river and is also the longest tributary river in the world with a length of 4,248 km (2,640 mi). The Madeira river is the largest tributary river by volume in the world with an average discharge of 31,200 m<sup>3</sup>/s (1,100,000 cu ft/s).

A confluence, where two or more bodies of water meet together, usually refers to the joining of tributaries.

The opposite to a tributary is a distributary, a river or stream that branches off from and flows away from the main stream.<sup>[5]</sup> Distributaries are most often found in river deltas.



The Nam Khan flows into the Mekong at Luang Prabang in Laos

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## Terminology

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"Right tributary" and "left tributary" (or "right-bank tributary" and "left-bank tributary") are terms stating the orientation of the tributary relative to the flow of the main stem river. These terms are defined from the perspective of looking downstream (in the direction the water current of the main stem is going).<sup>[6]</sup>

An "early tributary" is a tributary that joins the main stem river closer to the main river's source than its end. Similarly, a "late tributary" joins the main river much further downstream, closer to the main river's end point.

In the United States, where tributaries sometimes have the same name as the river into which they feed, they are called **forks**. These are typically designated by compass direction. For example, the American River in California receives flow from its North, Middle, and South forks. The Chicago River's North Branch has the East, West, and Middle Fork; the South Branch has its South Fork, and used to have a West Fork as well (now filled in).

Forks are sometimes designated as right or left. Here, the "handedness" is from the point of view of an observer facing upstream. For instance, Steer Creek has a left tributary which is called Right Fork Steer Creek.

## Ordering and enumeration

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Tributaries are sometimes listed starting with those nearest to the source of the river and ending with those nearest to the mouth of the river. The Strahler Stream Order examines the arrangement of tributaries in a hierarchy of first, second, third, and higher orders, with the first-order tributary being typically the least in size. For example, a second-order tributary would be the result of two or more first-order tributaries combining to form the second-order tributary.<sup>[6]</sup>

Another method is to list tributaries from mouth to source, in the form of a tree structure, stored as a tree data structure.

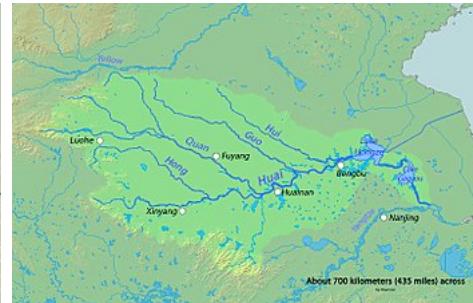
## Gallery

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A gallery of major river basins with tributaries



Looking downstream, the Shenandoah River (bottom right) meets the Potomac River which flows from bottom left to top right, so the Shenandoah is a right tributary of the Potomac, not a left tributary



The basin of the Amazon River is a system made up of many tributary streams. The streams shown on the map besides the Amazon are tributaries of the Amazon.

The Benue River is fed by multiple tributaries originating in the Adamawa Plateau; many of the highest tributaries are seasonal streams. The Benue is itself a major tributary of the Niger.

Huai River (which itself is a tributary of the Yangtze River) and tributaries.



Jialing River (which itself is a tributary of the Yangtze River) and tributaries.

The Liao River is a much simpler example of a river basin with tributaries. The main tributaries noted on this map are the Hun River, Taizi River, Dongliao River, Xinkai River, Xiliao River, Xar Moron River and the Laoha River. The Xiliao River has the tributaries on the map the Xar Moron and Laoha Rivers.

The Mekong is a trans-boundary river, originating in the Tibetan Plateau. Its upper tributary river systems (e.g. the Salween River) are restricted to narrow gorges, but the tributaries that feed its lower reaches (e.g. the Mun River) cover larger areas.

The water basin of the Wabash River; the other rivers (not including the Ohio River) are tributaries of the Wabash River. The Vermillion River (and its forks) is a highlighted example of a tributary of the Wabash River. The Wabash River is also a tributary of the Ohio River, which in turn is a tributary of the Mississippi river.



The Yamuna is the second largest tributary river of the Ganges and the longest tributary in India. It flows almost parallel to the Ganges about its right bank for 1,376 kilometres (855 mi) before merging with it at the Triveni Sangam, Allahabad.

## See also

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- Estuary

## References

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  3. "Definition of TRIBUTARY" (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tributary>). Merriam-Webster.
  4. Krebs, Robert E. (2003). *The Basics of Earth Science* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=-4ndyH7u6T0C&pg=PA179>). Greenwood Publishing Group. ISBN 978-0-313-31930-3.
  5. "opposite to a tributary" (<http://www.physicalgeography.net/physgeoglos/t.html>). PhysicalGeography.net, Michael Pidwirny & Scott Jones, 2009. Viewed 17 September 2012.
  6. Bisson, Peter and Wondzell, Steven. "Olympic Experimental State Forest Synthesis of Riparian Research and Monitoring" ([http://file.dnr.wa.gov/publications/lm\\_hcp\\_oesf\\_dec09\\_riparian\\_synthesis.pdf](http://file.dnr.wa.gov/publications/lm_hcp_oesf_dec09_riparian_synthesis.pdf)), United States Forest Service, p. 15 (1 December 2009).
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