Noun. (Click on the speech icon to hear the pronunciation of the word \ˈō-nəs\)

- A difficult or disagreeable responsibility or necessity; a burden or obligation.
- A stigma.
- Blame.
- (onus probandi) The burden of proof.

The noun, onus, is a formal word for responsibility or obligation. If you assign onus as a vocabulary word, it puts the onus on your student to find out what it means.

Onus is a formal or sophisticated way to say "responsibility" or "duty." It sounds a little like the unrelated word owner, so think about the person with onus as owner of the responsibility. Our students like to say "my bad" (or at least they used to), so this would be like saying it is "on me" or "on us," hence onus. If the onus is on you to organize a fund raiser, you have to set the whole thing up. The related legal term onus probandi means the burden of proof, which requires the accuser to prove the case against the accused.

Usage:
- The onus was on the defense attorney.
- He was clearly even shyer than she was and therefore, the onus was on her to talk to him because that was the polite thing to do.
- The onus is on the buyer to determine for himself that the good or service is satisfactory.
- The onus is then on the author to make their work so compelling that the new reader can't wait to scour the used book market for other novels and will *have* to buy new.
- The onus is still on the job seeker to network like mad, be at-the-ready for opportunities, and be the well packaged, articulate job candidate at all times.
- But at the same time, the onus is on the U.S. to show that it has the will and means to protect its allies against aggression.
- “The onus is on the food processing industry to cut back on sodium in processed meats and cheese used to make pizza," says Dr. Kevin Willis, a Canadian Stroke Network director and spokesman on the issue.
**DIRECTIONS:** Discuss the meaning of the word with your students, with special emphasis on any variations or nuances of the word specific to your discipline. Consider taking it a step further by using one or all of the following ideas as you involve students with the new vocabulary. **Remember to preview all content you intend to share with students. Not all items on the lists provided below are appropriate for all classes or age levels.**

**#1** Read this January 3, 2014 article from *Salon* entitled, “Hack Job Tries to Link Snowden and China.” The article discusses one reporter’s opinion that “A speculation-riddled, fact free article in the Daily Beast is little more than a smear effort.” The word is used in the fifth paragraph when the author states that “this speculation puts the onus not on Snowden but on the Chinese reporter” (Lennard).

http://www.salon.com/2014/01/03/hack_job_tries_to_link_snowden_and_china/


**#2** Read and discuss this interesting article about “cow banks” in Africa from the *BBC* entitled “Zimbabwe Farmers Benefit from Cattle Collateral.” While proponents believe it is a win-win situation for both the government and the small-scale farmer, skeptics argue (in the seventh paragraph from the end) that “the cow banking scheme puts the onus on small-scale farmers to increase the national herd instead of commercial farmers” (Mugaga qtd. in Hungwe).

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25156209


**#3** Look up (online, or our library carries this periodical) and read this article from a recent issue (Aug. 5, 2013) of *The Scientific American* entitled “Synthetic Molecule Chokes TB Growth.” Among other things the article discusses the idea that “typically, state-funded institutions such as the Pasteur Institute Korea have focused on drug discovery, with the onus for drug development placed on the pharmaceutical industry.”

**#4** Read this article about online sales tax published Sept. 24, 2013 in the *Washington Post*. Point out and discuss with students the fact that “currently, states have the authority to collect online sales tax, but the onus is on the shoppers, not the sellers, to report what the transactions” (Harrison).


Read this Dec. 9th article about the New Orleans Saints game with the Panthers. In it, the Saints are stated to have “... widened their offensive sets, which widened the Panthers’ zone coverages, placing more of an onus on the defensive backs.” Discuss this idea of cause and effect with your students.