

Oxford English Dictionary | The definitive record of the English language

acquire, v.

Pronunciation: Brit. /ə'kwʌɪə/, U.S. /ə'kwai(ə)r/

Forms: 1ME **acquere**, 1ME **aqwere**, 1ME-15 **acquyre**, 1ME- **acquire**, 15 **adquire**, 16 ...

Frequency (in current use):

Origin: Of multiple origins. Partly a borrowing from French. Partly a borrowing from Latin.

Etymons: French *acquere-*, *acquerre*; Latin *acquīrere*.

Etymology: Partly < Anglo-Norman and Middle French *acquere-*, *aqwer-*, *aquerr-*...

1. *transitive*.

a. To gain possession of through skill or effort; to obtain, develop, or secure in a careful, concerted, often gradual manner. Formerly also with †*to* or indirect object.

a1450 *Seven Sages* (Cambr. Dd.1.17) (1845) l. 1081 The childe were gode of lore, 3yt he wolde aqwere more.

?1504 W. ATKINSON tr. Thomas à Kempis *Ful Treat. Imytacyon Cryste* (Pynson) l. xi. 160 It is one specialle meane to acquyre pease, nat to intermytte vs of the wordes & werkes of those that attayne nat to vs.

1542 N. UDALL tr. Erasmus *Apophthegmes* II. f. 211 An empier is ofte tymes by the sweord & by roughnesse purchaced or acquired, but the same not reteined.

1604 W. SHAKESPEARE *Hamlet* III. ii. 7 In the very..whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance, that may giue it smoothnesse.

a1651 D. CALDERWOOD *Hist. Kirk Scotl.* (1843) III. 394 They acquired wealth by taking budds from such as had sutes to him.

a1680 S. BUTLER *Genuine Remains* (1759) I. 173 For what w'acquire by Pains and Art Is only due t'our own Desert.

1705 tr. W. Bosman *New Descr. Coast of Guinea* viii. 108 The Money we get here is indeed hardly enough acquired.

1766 W. BLACKSTONE *Comm. Laws Eng.* II. xiv. 220 The first purchasor..is he who first acquired the estate to his family.

1797 *Encycl. Brit.* XII. 182/1 He spared no pains to acquire himself power and dominion.

- 1824 W. IRVING *Tales of Traveller* (1849) 380 Wealth, which it was whispered he had acquired by buccaneering.
- 1876 L. STEPHEN *Hours in Libr.* 2nd Ser. vi. 243 He had..given his son the chance of acquiring a smattering of 'scholarship'.
- 1906 A. G. HYDE *G. Herbert & his Times* ii. 24 At nine he began to learn Welsh, and between ten and twelve he acquired a knowledge of logic and Greek.
- 1994 *Sci. Amer.* Nov. 63/3 Parenting that is warm and responsive but exerts sufficient control to guide and encourage children to acquire new skills promotes competence.
- 2009 *N.Y. Times* (National ed.) 2 Oct. C27/1 John and Barbara Wilkerson..began acquiring Aboriginal paintings in 1994.

b. Business. To purchase (a company, or a controlling stake in a company); to buy out, make the subject of a corporate acquisition or merger.

- 1877 *Law Times Rep.* 37 666/1 In the year 1865 the amalgamated company was acquired by the defendants.
- 1944 *Fortune* Mar. 228/2 The stock of Imperial and British Airways was acquired, and the two companies were merged into BOAC.
- 1977 *Economist* 12 Feb. 77/1 Without section 54, companies might..ramp up their shares before making a paper bid in order to acquire a company on the cheap.
- 1994 *Accountancy* Sept. 82/2 Where a group acquires a company with pre-entry capital losses, those losses are 'ring-fenced' and cannot be used to shelter other group members' capital gains.
- 2008 *Wall St. Jrnl.* 19 Feb. C3/1 Blank-check companies, so called because they begin life as empty shells and use their IPO proceeds to acquire operating businesses.

2. transitive.

a. Of a thing: to come to have or possess (a quality, feature, etc), to attract, accrue; to develop or evolve (a new characteristic), esp. by virtue of a natural process.

- 1474 W. CAXTON tr. *Game & Playe of Chesse* (1883) IV. vii. 180 And yf the knyghtes..come to the ferthest lygne to fore them where theyr aduersaryes were sette. They [sc. the pawns] acqyre the dignyte that the quene hath graunted to

her by grace [Fr. *C'est leur fin et leur entente qu'il puissent acquerre par vertu et par force ce que les nobles ont par leur dignité*].

- ?1541 R. COPLAND *Galen's Fourth Bk. Therapeutike* sig. Di, in *Guy de Chauliac's Questyonyary Cyrurgyens* Whan it [sc. an ulcer] is made as cruent in cuttinge the labyes..necessarly it is made caued and acquyreth ryght great dystaunce of labyes.
- 1544 *Bk. Chyldren* in T. Phaer tr. J. Goeurot *Regiment Lyfe* (new ed.) sig. zv The said dysease acquyreth suche a strengthe aboue nature, that in processe of time it is vtterlye incurable.
- 1617 S. COLLINS *Epphata to F. T.* II. x. 417 The elements by prayer acquire a degree of sanctification.
- 1644 K. DIGBY *Two Treat.* I. viii. 58 No slownesse that light can acquire by the resistance of the refracting body.
- 1693 T. P. BLOUNT *Nat. Hist.* 42 Cinnamon..acquires its..strength by fifteen Days Sunning.
- 1799 *Monthly Rev.* 30 146 The tapetum appeared very bright, the retina not having acquired sufficient opacity to become visible.
- 1818 F. ACCUM *Pract. Ess. Chem. Re-agents* (ed. 2) 167 The mixture will acquire an orange colour.
- 1871 C. DARWIN *Descent of Man* II. II. xiii. 95 In the spring the feathers on the head of the male reed-bunting..acquire a fine black colour.
- 1933 L. BLOOMFIELD *Language* xxi. 384 When a relatively sonorous phoneme is non-syllabic, it often acquires syllabic function.
- 1980 *Amer. Speech* 55 184 Groups of words already in the language that acquire fresh meanings by use in new situations.
- 2000 *Which?* Oct. 21/3 Strong old ales can mature beautifully, acquiring sherry-like characteristics.

b. To come to have or possess without specific effort or intent; to receive, develop; to gain accidentally or involuntarily, 'pick up'.

- ?1483 W. CAXTON tr. *Caton* IV. sig. i.viii These fyue goodes acqueren the Iuste and good folke after their dethe.
- a1533 LD. BERNERS tr. A. de Guevara *Golden Bk. M. Aurelius* (1537) xlvi. f. 92^v Take hede my son, euery prince, doinge Iustice, acquireth ennemies in the execution therof.

- 1635 T. JACKSON *Humiliation Sonne of God* VIII. v. §5 All other habitual sinnes or vices are not acquired but by many unnecessitated vicious acts.
- 1650 H. BROOKE *Υγιεινή* 156 Children being at first bred up restively, acquire a habit thereby, and cannot afterwards..change their course.
- 1726 J. SWIFT *Gulliver* II. III. x. 145 They acquired an additional Ghastliness in proportion to their number of Years.
- 1729 S. SWITZER *Introd. Gen. Syst. Hydrostaticks & Hydraulicks* 176 We acquire..an Idea of Solidity by the Touch.
- 1758 *Idler* 10 June 73 The Idler acquires weight by lying still.
- 1843 N. HAWTHORNE in *Boys' & Girls' Mag.* Aug. 268/2 [He] was bred in Italy, where he acquired very idle habits.
- 1876 *Mind* 1 273 He has seen convalescents from mania distinctly acquire delusions of persecution, &c., from frequent intercourse with insane persons.
- 1898 *Med. News* 22 Jan. 107/1 The patient..acquired her disease, maritally and genitally, during June, 1897.
- 1920 *Amer. Woman* Aug. 9/3 The woman who has acquired blackheads..may begin to improve the texture of her skin by thoroughly cleansing it.
- 1999 *Zameen* Nov. 68/1 There are some tastes you acquire so early in life that they stay with you forever.

3. *transitive*.

a. To attract or achieve (regard, or a specific reputation, name, etc.). Also with *for*, *to*, or indirect object.

- 1477 W. CAXTON tr. R. Le Fèvre *Hist. Jason* (1913) 7 By his valiance he shold acquire thonour of alle thassemblee.
- 1531 T. ELYOT *Bk. named Gouvernour* III. xxv. f. 249^v Reputyng it great foly & madnes to acquire by the executyng of iustice..an opinion of tyrannye amonge the people.
- 1624 T. GATAKER *Discuss. Transubstant.* 144 Thereby to acquire judgement or condemnation to themselves.
- 1663 J. HEATH *Flagellum* vi, in *Harl. Misc.* (1753) I. 275 Hence he [sc. Cromwell] acquired that terrible Name of Ironsides.
- 1670–1 *Act 22 & 23 Charles II* c. 3 in *Statutes of Realm* (1819) V. 693 Severall persons..have gained and acquired unto themselves the Reputation and Name of Bankers.

- 1711 in *10th Rep. Royal Comm. Hist. MSS* (1885) App. I. 142 When he has acquir'd to himself a good stock of reputation perhaps he will not envy ours.
- 1776 E. GIBBON *Decline & Fall* I. Notes p. lvi/2 They had acquired much reputation by the use of the *plumbatæ*, or darts loaded with lead. Each soldier carried five of these.
- 1814 *New Brit. Theatre* I. 530 What glory might not any lady..acquire for herself were she..to succeed in getting up a Masque..on one of her nights.
- 1854 *Calcutta Rev.* **23** 13 Many princes have acquired to themselves a name by erecting public works.
- 1965 C. ZIGROSSER & C. M. GAEHDE *Guide to Collecting Orig. Prints* iii. 26 The reason steel-faced prints have acquired a bad name is that they have often been printed in a slipshod manner.
- 2003 *New Yorker* 7 July 72/3 The literary world is one of the easiest in which to acquire a bad-boy reputation, and Houellebecq duly obliged.

b. Of a quality, circumstance, etc.: to secure (influence, a name or reputation) *to* or *for* a person or thing. Also with indirect object. Now *rare* and *archaic*.

- 1541 T. ELYOT *Image of Gouvernance* vii. f. 14 The haulte countenance and the difficile accesse, whiche was in Tarquine the laste kynge Romaines, acquired to him that odious surname to be called Tarquine the proude.
- 1616 W. SHAKESPEARE *All's Well that ends Well* (1623) IV. iii. 72 The great dignitie that his valour hath here acquir'd for him.
- 1656 W. MONTAGU tr. J. Du Bosc *Accomplish'd Woman* 1 Such a kind of wit acquires us a command as powerful as pleasing.
- 1759 W. ROBERTSON *Hist. Scotl.* (1817) I. II. 382 Another circumstance contributed to acquire the Regent such considerable influence.
- 1761 tr. C. Batteux *Course Belles Lettres* III. IV. ii. 201 What he has done in any one species, or distinct kind of writing, would have been sufficient to have acquired him a very great name.
- 1864 *Ladies' Repository* Sept. 516/1 Corinne is the..shining, immortal work that first acquired her [sc. Mme. de Stael] a rank among great writers.
- 1872 S. D. ALEXANDER *Princeton Coll. during Eighteenth Cent.* 112 It was doubtless this trait which acquired for him and his brother Samuel..the appellation..*Botheration Primus*, and *Botheration Secundus*.

1901 *Jrnl. Trop. Med.* 4 242/2 Bath waters cure the malarial cachezia in a manner that has acquired for them a special reputation.

†4. *transitive*. To attain through motion; to get to, reach.
Obsolete. rare.

1665 J. GLANVILL *Scepsis Scientifica* xi. 60 Motion cannot be perceived without the perception of its Terms, *viz.* The parts of space which it immediately left, and those which it next acquires. Now the space left and acquir'd.in such slow progressions, is so inconsiderable, that, [etc.].

5. *transitive*. To achieve fluency in or command of (a language or an aspect of a language).

1786 *Madras Courier* 25 Jan. 16/2 Our conference with the King, till we acquired the language, was by our linguist in Malay to the King's Malay slaves.

1844 *Southern Q. Rev.* July 189 A Spaniard who had been captured by the Indians in a previous expedition, who had acquired the Maya language.

1895 T. HARDY *Jude* I. v. 33 To acquire languages..was a herculean performance which gradually led him on to a greater interest in it than in the presupposed patent process.

1939 P. DE V. PIENAAR in *Proc. 3rd Internat. Congr. Phonetic Sci. Ghent 1938* 353 The Bantu and Hottentot children, when they acquire the language from their parents, at first have great difficulty with the click sounds.

1980 A. KENNY *Aquinas* iii. 76 Chomsky has argued that it is impossible to explain the rapidity with which children acquire the grammar of a language from the..utterances of their parents unless we postulate a species-specific innate language-learning ability.

2010 F. GROSJEAN *Bilingual* I. vii. 81 Early learning—acquiring a second or third language in early childhood, and using it extensively—is a good guarantee for ‘accentless’ speech.

6. *transitive*. Of a sensory device or something containing one: to begin receiving signals from (a source); to locate (and track) (an object or signal, esp. a military target).
Originally *Radar*.

- 1953 M. H. ARONSON *Electronic Circuitry Instruments & Equipm.* xv. 255 Search radars are used to acquire a target.
- 1962 A. SHEPARD in *Into Orbit* 171 Once the spacecraft goes into orbit, the stations pass it on from one to the other... Their radar devices 'acquire' it first, then lock on to it and follow it until it leaves their area.
- 1970 N. ARMSTRONG et al. *First on Moon* iv. 78 Apollo 11 about to be acquired at the Tananarive (Malagasy Republic) station.
- 1973 *New Scientist* 25 Oct. 267/2 The launching aircraft has first to acquire the hostile radar's transmission.
- 1991 *Pop. Sci.* Oct. 26/2 An E²I [sc. missile] can take two paths to the warhead: It can...arc out of the atmosphere to acquire its target and reenter as it homes in.
- 1996 T. CLANCY *SSN* (2000) ix. 192 A minute never lasted so long as when you were waiting for torpedoes to acquire the enemy.
- 2010 *Hindustan Times* (Nexis) 1 June The handset's GPS capability is its biggest asset. Not only does it acquire satellites faster than any other handset,..the applications are extremely handy.

7. transitive. Computing. Of a computer: to gather (data) by means of a peripheral sensory device. Cf. *data acquisition* *n.* at DATA *n.* Compounds 2.

- 1970 R. E. JENSEN in J. P. Schadé & J. Smith *Computers & Brains* 8 By very simple programming for counting the number of heart beats, heart rate is acquired and displayed.
- 1986 *New Scientist* 26 4 (*adv.*) The maintenance and development of software necessary to analyse data acquired using both the UHF and VHF radars.
- 2002 P. DAVIS & S. SCHWARTZ *CorelDraw 10 for Windows* xvi. 197 CorelDraw 10 can acquire images directly from a connected scanner, digital camera, or desktop video camera.
- 2007 *Pop. Sci.* Aug. 66 Detailed topographical data acquired during a flyover of the space shuttle Endeavour.

Copyright © 2019 Oxford University Press . All rights reserved.

Last Viewed by First Circuit Library on 10/21/2019