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competent, *adj.*

Pronunciation: /'kɒmpɪtənt/

Forms: Also ME **competent**, ME–15 **competente**, 15 **compu-**, **-po-**, **-pytent**.

Frequency (in current use):

Etymology: < French *compétent* ‘terme de droit’ (15th cent. in Littré), and < Latin *competent-em* suitable, fitting, proper, lawful, present participle of *competere* in its neuter senses: see COMPETE *v.*¹

†1. Suitable, fit, appropriate, proper. *Obs.* in general sense.

- c1430 LYDGATE tr. Bochas *Fall of Princes* (1554) vi. i. 146 b What maner torment..Wer competent, couenable, or condigne To him.
- a1450 in *Eng. Gilds* (1870) 445 And to kepe hir fest in competent place be the alderman and maistres assigned.
- c1475 (►?c1400) *Apol. Lollard Doctr.* (1842) 34 Euer bi oportunite, or competent acordauns, to be redi to fil it.
- 1534 T. MORE *Treat. Passion* in *Wks.* 1284/2 God in the creacion of man, gauie to hym two states: one, competent and conuenient for hys mortal nature.
- a1549 A. BORDE *Fyrst Bk. Introd. Knowl.* (1870) i. 127 Good vytales, good meate, wine, and competent Ale.
- 1667 N. FAIRFAX in *Philos. Trans.* (Royal Soc.) 2 549 A common Sudorifick..in competent time relieved him.
- 1791 J. SMEATON *Narr. Edystone Lighthouse* (1793) §192 Materials..very competent to our purpose.

2. Suitable to a person's rank or position; suitable or sufficient for comfortable living. *arch.*

- 1440 *Close Roll 23 Hen. VI* A competent annuite for lyff.
- 1463 in S. Tymms *Wills & Inventories Bury St. Edmunds* (1850) 33 A competent bed with ij peyre shetys.
- 1580 T. TUSSER *Five Hundred Pointes Good Husbandrie* (new ed.) f. 8^v A competent liuing, and honestly had, makes such as are godlie, both thankfull and glad.
- 1651 in E. Nicholas *Papers* (1886) I. 242 To have a competent Joynter for her and estate for her children.
- 1667 *Chamberlayne's Magnæ Britanniæ Notitia* (1743) i. iii. x. 244 Officers..who have all competent salaries.
- 1865 G. GROTE *Plato* I. iii. 128 Leaving a competent property.
- 1876 K. E. DIGBY *Introd. Hist. Law Real Prop.* (ed. 2) iii. 115 If she [a widow] depart from the castle, then a competent house shall be provided for her.

3.**a.** Suitable, adequate, or sufficient, in amount or extent.

- c1440 *Gesta Romanorum* (Harl.) lxi. 257 A semly yonge kny3te.. he wolle fist for yow..yf ye wolle yeve to him competent salarye.
- 1491 *Act 7 Hen. VII c. 14* As muche therof..as shuld be competent or nedefull to the seid reparacion.
- ?a1560 L. DIGGES *Geom. Pract.: Pantometria* (1571) i. xxxv. sig. Lj v Draw a streight line of competent length.
- 1626 BACON *Sylua Syluarum* §108 Harmony requireth a competent distance of Notes.
- 1664 J. EVELYN *Pomona* vi. 17 in *Sylva* A competent while before Christmas.
- 1791 J. SMEATON *Narr. Edystone Lighthouse* (1793) §272 A competent quantity being put down to the bottom of the hole.
- 1817 J. MILL *Hist. Brit. India* II. v. ix. 705 Mr. Pitt's bill..being now supported by a competent majority, was passed into an act.

†b. Sufficient but not going beyond this: fair, moderate, reasonable, enough. *Obs.*

- 1535 J. MASON in H. Ellis *Orig. Lett. Eng. Hist.* II. II. 55 Vitaylls be of a competent prycce: all other things as cloth, lether, books, etc. be unresonable dere.
- 1581 R. MULCASTER *Positions* xxxiii. 119 Such as be newly recouered from sicknes..must content themselues with small and competent exercise.
- 1625 BACON *Ess.* (new ed.) 339 They grew to rest upon Number, rather Competent, then Vast.
- a1780 J. HARRIS *Philol. Inq.* (1781) II. ii. 77 Greek was spoken with competent purity in Constantinople, even to the fifteenth century.

4. Adequate or sufficient in quality or degree.

- 1597 T. MORLEY *Plaine & Easie Introd. Musicke* 76 You haue giuen me a competent reason.
- 1655 T. FULLER *Church-hist. Brit.* VII. 419 Learned men..had brought their work to some competent perfection.
- 1684 BP. G. BURNET in tr. T. More *Utopia* Pref. sig. A3 He that undertakes it, has a competent skill of the one Tongue, and is a Master of the other.
- 1691 J. RAY *Wisdom of God* 51 Necessary to define with competent Certainty.
- 1798 LD. AUCKLAND *Corr.* (1862) III. 387 Impossible to form any competent notion of what we are doing.
- 1817 M. KEATING *Trav.* I. 63 A model of this mountain..would supply infinitely the most competent idea of it.

5. Possessing the requisite qualifications *for*, or *to*; properly qualified.**a.** Of persons.

- 1692 R. BENTLEY *Confut. Atheism from Struct. & Origin Humane Bodies: Pt. II* 23 A matter..allowed by all competent Judges.
- 1702 *Clarendon's Hist. Rebellion* I. i. 16 The King asked him only of the Journey..of which he might be a competent counsellour.
- 1787 T. JEFFERSON *Writings* (1859) II. 207 The merchant..will be competent to this measure whenever he finds it a necessary one.
- 1856 R. W. EMERSON *Eng. Traits* v. 96 If all the wealth in the planet should perish..they know themselves competent to replace it.
- 1860 J. TYNDALL *Glaciers of Alps* I. ii. 13 We engaged a strong and competent guide.

b. transf.

- 1660 Bp. J. TAYLOR *Ductor Dubitantium* I. i. ii Religion is our competent guide.
- 1794 J. HUTTON *Diss. Philos. Light* 57 Our sight..is not always competent for determining the absolute want of light.
- 1878 T. H. HUXLEY *Physiogr.* (ed. 2) 127 A river is competent to effect its own purification unless overtaxed with pollution.

c. Of a stream: capable of transporting fragments of a certain size. (Cf. quot. 1878 at sense 5b.)

- 1877 G. K. GILBERT *Rep. Geol. Henry Mts.* (U.S. Geogr. & Geol. Surv. Rocky Mt. Region) v. 110 A stream which can transport débris of a given size, may be said to be competent to such débris. Since the maximum particles which streams are able to move are proportioned to a sixth power of their velocities, competence depends on velocity.
- 1960 B. W. SPARKS *Geomorphol.* v. 81 If a stream is not competent to move load of the calibre available.

d. Geol. Of a stratum of rock: able to transmit lateral pressure and, when formed in an anticline, to bear weight.

- 1893 B. WILLIS in *U.S. Geol. Surv. Ann. Rep.* II. 250 If we describe the sufficiently firm stratum by the word competent, we may formulate the law of anticlinal development... In strata under load an anticline arises along a line of initial dip, when a thrust, sufficiently powerful to raise the load, is transmitted by a competent stratum. The resulting anticline supports the load of an arch, and being adequate to that duty it may be called a competent structure.
- 1953 E. S. HILLS *Outl. Struct. Geol.* (ed. 3) iv. 82 Relatively strong ('competent') beds.
- 1965 A. HOLMES *Princ. Physical Geol.* (rev. ed.) x. 234 Strong competent beds of rocks like quartzite cannot readily change their thicknesses.

e. Biol. Of a cell: having a latent ability to develop in reaction to a

stimulus.

- 1932 C. H. WADDINGTON in *Philos. Trans. (Royal Soc.) B.* **221** 223 This competence is a new potentiality which has arisen. The idea of competence covers two concepts already in use, *reactionsfähig* and *labil determiniert*. Reactionsfähig means that the tissue..is competent to differentiate to a certain tissue but requires a definite stimulus.
- 1935 *Discovery* May 136/2 The ectoderm is continually changing through internal causes and is only reactive or ‘competent’ during a certain period of its existence, but within this period several different substances can cause a nervous differentiation.

6. Law. Legally qualified or sufficient.

a. Of a judge, court, etc.: Possessing jurisdiction or authority to act.

- 1483 CAXTON tr. *Caton A* viij Make thy self redy for to answere before thy competent juge.
- 1536 *Act 28 Hen. VIII c. 14 §6* Any competente courte, hauynge iurysdiction in the place.
- 1581 W. LAMBARDE *Eirenarcha* III. ii. 345 Whereof the Justices of Peace bee competent Judges.

b. Of a witness, evidence, etc.: Capable of being brought forward, admissible.

- a1626 BACON *Speech* in A. Wilson *Five Yeares King Iames* (1643) 71 Some few words touching the nature of the proofes, which in such a case are competent.
- 1768–78 W. BLACKSTONE *Comm. Laws Eng.* (ed. 8) III. iii. xxiii. 369 All witnesses..except such as are infamous or such as are interested in the event of the cause..are competent witnesses.
- 1883 *Law Rep.: Queen's Bench Div.* **11** 597 It has been held..that..an action for damages was not competent against a supreme judge for a censure passed by him..on a counsel.

c. Of a case, etc.: Within the jurisdiction of a court.

- 1708 *Chamberlayne's Magnæ Britanniæ Notitia* (1743) II. II. vi. 389 The causes competent to the Admiralty Court of Scotland, are these among others.

7. More generally. Of things, etc.:

a. Belonging to as a rightful possession or property; proper, appertaining, due.

- 1614 J. SELDEN *Titles of Honor* 118 Som abstracts are proper notes of Soueraigntie: as Maiestie which is now competent to none but supreme Princes.
- 1690 J. LOCKE *Ess. Humane Understanding* II. i. 39 That, perhaps, is the Privilege of the infinite Author and Preserver of all things..but is not competent to any finite Being.

b. Within one's rights, legally or formally open or permissible.

1765–9 W. BLACKSTONE *Comm. Laws Eng.* It is not competent to the defendant to allege fraud in the plaintiff.

1841 H. J. STEPHEN *New Comm. Laws Eng.* I. 100 Though it is competent to Parliament to legislate for the colonies.

c. Admissible by rule, legitimate.

1795 W. PALEY *View Evidences Christianity* (ed. 3) II. III. ii. 301 I think that it is competent to the Christian apologist to return this answer.

1850 T. S. BAYNES *New Anal. Logical Forms* 76 Having particular conclusions where universal are competent.

1850 SIR W. HAMILTON in T. S. Baynes *New Anal. Logical Forms* 154 Two arrangements are competent.

†**8.** Compatible, congruous *with*. Obs. rare.

a1670 J. HACKET *Scrinia Reserata* (1693) I. 138 'Tis no more competent with obedience than light with darkness.

†**9.** ? Requiring competence. Obs.

1728 SWIFT *Intelligencer* (1729) ix. 84 How..so great Share in the most competent Parts of publick Management, hath been..entrusted to Commoners.

†**10.** quasi-*adv.* In circumstances of competence.

1557 F. SEAGER *Schoole of Vertue in Babees Bk.* (2002) I. 354 Ye that are poore, with your state be contente, Not hauinge wherwith to lyue competente.

†**11.** quasi-*n.* A competency. Obs.

1575 *Brieff Disc. Troub. Franckford* 156 Their are not paste 17 or 18 whiche haue competent ynough to liue vpon.

1614 J. SELDEN *Titles of Honor* 235 An annuall summe and competent.

d. *Med.* Of a valve or sphincter: functioning normally; able to prevent reflux. Opp. INCOMPETENT *adj.* 2b.

- 1881 G. STEELL *Physical Signs Cardiac Dis.* 16 Tricuspid incompetency may exist without this sign, if the venous valves remain competent.
- 1915 A. E. BARCLAY *Alimentary Tract* xii. 124 This [ileo-cæcal] valve was found to be perfectly competent at the operation.
- 1977 *Jrnl. Cardiovasc. Surg.* 18 506/2 Only 4 out of ten pulmonary valves were competent at 20 mm of Hg pressure and all were incompetent at a mean pressure of 100 mm of Hg.
- 1982 *Brit. Heart Jrnl.* 47 473 Relief of left ventricular outflow tract obstruction was achieved in a majority of cases and the valves were entirely competent.
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