

Oxford English Dictionary | The definitive record of the English language

con, n.4

Frequency (in current use):

Etymology: In sense 1, shortened < various words, as CONFIDANT *n.*, CONUNDRUM *n.*, CONFORMIST *n.*, CONTRACT *n.*¹ In sense 2, shortened < CONFIDENCE *n.* In sense 3, shortened < CONVICT *n.*¹, CONVICTION *n.* In sense 4, shortened < CONSTRUE *n.*

1. colloq. or slang. As an occasional shortened form of various words, as *confidant*, *conundrum*, *conformist*, *contract*.

- 1825 C. M. WESTMACOTT *Eng. Spy* I. 30 We were soon the most inseparable cons.
- 1841 *Fraser's Mag.* **23** 59 Pun, riddles, cons, etc. are low.
- 1882 *Banner* (newspr.) To what denomination the family belongs, whether they are Cons or Noncons.
- 1889 *Pall Mall Gaz.* 24 Aug. 2/1 About the 'contract system'..The men get some 'con', as they call it, or 'plus' pay, but for every penn'orth of 'con' the contractor gets two penn'orth of work out of them.

2. = CONFIDENCE *n.* 10. Used *attrib.* in **con game**, **con man**, **con talk**, etc. (Also *ellipt.*) orig. *U.S.*

- 1889 *Portland (Oregon) Mercury* 29 June 1/7 It does not take an unsophisticated countryman to get swindled by the 'con man'.
- 1896 G. ADE *Artie* i. 5 He was..puttin' up the large juicy con talk.
- 1896 G. ADE *Artie* i. 8 Not that I'm strong on the con talk.
- 1896 G. ADE *Artie* xiv. 131 If they wanted me to be president o' the whole shootin' match, I'd..grow some side-whiskers and put up as tall a con game as that old stiff we've got there now.
- 1901 'J. FLYNT' *World of Graft* 100 'It's mine,' I said... 'They took the con.'
- 1902 L. MEAD *How Words Grow* (1907) 165 'A con' is an abbreviation of confidence man.
- 1903 *N.Y. Sun* 30 Nov. 7 Two sailors say he worked the 'con' game on them.
- 1911 H. QUICK *Yellowstone Nights* xii. 318 The cinnersure of the eye of every sure-thing or con-man on South Halsted street.
- 1925 E. WALLACE *King by Night* xxxvi. 162 A burglar is a burglar, and never goes in for the 'con' game.
- 1928 E. WALLACE *Gunner* ii. 24 Sam Larber, the con. man.
- 1928 F. N. HART *Bellamy Trial* iii. 87 The stuff of which con men and race-track touts..are made.
- 1928 E. WALLACE *Gunner* xxviii. 224 He's never done anything except con. work.
- 1935 W. H. AUDEN & C. ISHERWOOD *Dog beneath Skin* I. 33 From con-man and coiner protect and bless.
- 1940 D. W. MAURER (*title*) The Big Con.

- 1951 J. B. PRIESTLEY *Festival at Farbridge* II. ii. 310 You're a little gang of crooks, con types living on your wits.
- 1960 *Observer* 25 Dec. 7/6 Various petty fiddles and con games to which Christmas trading lent itself.
- 1961 J. WAIN *Weep before God* 23 I could forgive Even the worst, the con. men who harangue Their fellow artists.
- 1967 *Listener* 21 Dec. 821/1 The intellectual theoreticians of visual pop culture have succeeded..in pulling a con.

3. *Criminals' slang.* = CONVICT *n.*¹, CONVICTION *n.*

- 1893 in J. Hawthorne *Confess. Convict* 11 Prisoners are known as 'con', which is short for convict, and the whole body of prisoners is designated 'condom'—short for convictdom.
- 1925 N. LUCAS *Autobiogr. Crook* xvii. 231 'Got any cons?' he said. 'I beg your pardon.' 'Cons—bin lagged afore?'
- 1926 J. BLACK *You can't Win* xix. 279 The other 'cons' will blackmail me.
- 1936 'J. CURTIS' *Gilt Kid* xxvii. 266 For this breaking and entering lark at least eighteen months for a man with two cons... It was going to make four convictions for him.
- 1958 F. NORMAN *Bang to Rights* III. 99 I had three really good friend among the con's.
- 1958 F. NORMAN *Bang to Rights* III. 152 I already had two con's and had only been out of the nick a few weeks.

4. = CONSTRUE *n.*

- 1905 H. A. VACHELL *Hill* iii We must mug up our 'cons' well enough to scrape along without 'puns' and extra school.
- 1906 *Westm. Gaz.* 17 Dec. 11/1 He 'skewed' his 'cons' and 'reps'.
- 1910 R. BROOKE *Let.* 25 Feb. (1968) 221 Many thanks for the con.

DERIVATIVES

Hence (from sense 2). orig. *U.S.*

con *v.*⁵ (*trans.*) to persuade, to speak persuasively to; to dupe, to swindle.

- 1896 G. ADE *Artie* iv. 35 Don't try to con me with no such talk.
- 1900 G. ADE *Fables in Slang* 90 The Property Man gave it as his Opinion that Mansfield conned the Critics.
- 1908 G. H. LORIMER *Jack Spurlock* v. 103 The detective began to get a little angry. 'You've been conned, Miss Grey... He's all to the bad.'
- 1917 C. MATHEWSON *Second Base Sloan* xiv. 196 Don't let anyone con you into signing a contract.
- 1932 'EX-CONVICT NO. —' *Dartmoor from Within* viii. 241 I..laugh—loud and long. 'Conned'—'conned'

by a pair of kids. I, the wise guy,..‘conned’ by one of..[Nobby’s] pupils on my very first night of freedom.

- 1961 ‘B. WELLS’ *Day Earth caught Fire* vii. 112 Some crack-pot had conned the news~room into believing that smells coming up from the rhino and elephants that haunt that territory were causing pollution in the air breathed in Nigeria.
- 1962 *Listener* 26 Apr. 745/1 This mild tale of a shy boy conned into giving a girl a fortune.
- 1967 M. REYNOLDS *After Some Tomorrow* 7 Nobody can gamble it away from me or con me out of it.

DRAFT ADDITIONS JANUARY 2011

con artist *n. colloq.* (orig. *U.S.*) a person who perpetrates a confidence trick or fraud; a con man or swindler; also in extended use.

- 1898 *Times* (Washington D.C.) 17 Aug. 6/1 The ex-Pittsburg twirler was positively invincible as long as he wanted to be, and, up to the seventh inning, he gave the visiting ‘con’ artists but four hits.
- 1899 *Washington Post* 29 June 2/2 ‘Ha! ha! ha!’ laughs the pop-eyed con artist.
- 1914 G. S. HALL *Adolescence* (new ed.) 923 As a consequence, the child may become a ‘con artist’ to deal with the inconsistencies.
- 1967 ‘T. WELLS’ *Dead by Light of Moon* xiii. 126 A street merchant is a con artist who pretends to sell stolen goods.
- 1987 K. LETTE *Girls’ Night Out* (1989) 184 I, not he, had been the con artist. Emotional break and enter.
- 2002 A. BELLIN *Poker Nation* ix. 145 The mark of a great scam is that the con artist can stay right where he is, because the pigeon never figures out what went down.

Oxford University Press

Copyright © 2017 Oxford University Press . All rights reserved.

Your access is brought to you by:

