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## decide, v.<sup>1</sup>

**Pronunciation:** Brit. /dɪ'saɪd/, U.S. /də'saɪd/, /di'saɪd/

**Forms:** ME–16 **decyde**, ME–16 **descide**, ME– **decide**, 15 **discede**, 15 **disside**, 15 **dissyde**, 15–16 **desyde**, 16 **descyde**, 16 **deside**, 16 **discide**; Sc. pre-17 **decid**, pre-17 **decite**, pre-17 **decyde**, pre-17 **decyid**, pre-17 **deside**, pre-17 **desite**, pre-17 **dessyede**, pre-17 **desyd**, pre-17 **dicyd**, pre-17 **discyd**, pre-17 **discyde**, pre-17 **dissite**, pre-17 **dissyd**, pre-17 **dissyde**, pre-17 **dissyide**, pre-17 **disyde**, pre-17 **dicyd**, pre-17 **dysyde**, pre-17 **decide**.

**Frequency (in current use):**

**Origin:** Of multiple origins. Partly a borrowing from French. Partly a borrowing from Latin. **Etymons:** French *decider*; Latin *dēcidere*.

**Etymology:** < (i) Middle French *decider*, *descider* (French *décider*) to arrive at an opinion or conclusion about (a matter) (1378), to settle or resolve (a dispute or contention) by passing judgement (a1390), to come to a decision or conclusion regarding a matter (1426; frequently in *decider de*, *decider sur*),

and its etymon (ii) classical Latin *dēcidere* to cut off, to cut down, to mark out, carve, to settle, decide, to reach a settlement < *dē-* DE- *prefix* + *caedere* to cut down (see CAESURA *n.*).

Compare Catalan *decidir* (1393), Spanish *decidir* (13th cent.), Portuguese *decidir* (1532 as †*deçedir*), Italian *decidere* (a1321 in sense ‘to cut (something) off’, end of the 15th cent. in sense ‘to make a decision about (something)’).

With the prefix variation, compare DE- *prefix* 1f.

With sense 5, compare DISCIDE *v.*

**I. To come or bring to a resolution or conclusion.**

**1.**

**a. trans.** To arrive at an opinion or conclusion about (a matter under consideration); to make a decision regarding (question, issue, etc., on which there is doubt or dispute), esp. after considering several alternatives. Freq. with indirect question or other clause as object, expressing the matter under consideration.

†a1393 GOWER *Confessio Amantis* (Fairf.) VII. l. 52 (MED) Lo, thus danz Aristotiles These thre sciences hath divided And the nature also decided, Wherof that ech of hem schal serve.

1593 R. HOOKER *Of Lawes Eccl. Politie* IV. x. 188 Till it be decided who haue stood for truth.

1646 J. SHIRLEY *Triumph of Beavtie* 17 How shall Paris, Whose yeares are green, & too unripe for judgment, Decide the worth of three such Deities.

1693 J. EVELYN tr. J. de La Quintinie *Compl. Gard'ner* I. II. vi. 30 It is easie to decide the choice of those two Expositions.

- 1746 J. WESLEY *Let.* 25 June (1931) II. 69 The best way of deciding the points in question with us is cool and friendly argumentation.
- 1787 *Ann. Reg. 1784–5* App. Chron. 283/2 The judges are appointed to decide the law, the juries to decide the fact.
- 1824 J. A. YATES *Colonial Slavery* iv. 57 Which valuers decide the price to be paid.
- 1862 J. PHIN *Open Air Grape Culture* App. ii. 324 It will next be proper to decide the height of the wall, that we may know the number of cordons to be erected.
- 1921 *Painters Mag.* July 16/1 Generally it is the women of the house who determine when it shall be repainted, and who decide the color scheme.
- 1970 E. BRUTON *Diamonds* (1978) xii. 264 Grading a cut stone for colour means deciding the amount by which it deviates from the whitest possible.
- 2000 R. HOSKING *At Japanese Table* Pref. p. viii The chef will decide the menu on the basis of what foodstuffs are at their best.

**b. intr.** To come to a decision or conclusion. Chiefly with *on*, *upon*, *about*, etc.

- 1572 J. HIGGINS *Huloet's Dict.* (rev. ed.) sig. Miv<sup>v</sup> Decide vpon some matter. *De aliquo negotio decidere.*
- 1600 *Maydes Metamorphosis* I. sig. A3 The question first must be discided on..Who were most cruell: those that did obay, Or he that gaue commandment for the fact?
- 1699 tr. J. de La Bruyère *Characters* 317 Descartes rule never to decide on the least truth, before 'tis clearly and distinctly known, is convenient and just in the judgment we give of persons.
- a1743 A. M. RAMSAY *Philos. Princ. Nat. & Revealed Relig.* (1749) II. vi. 493 [The schoolmen] multiplied useless questions, became minute in deciding about metaphysical quibbles, and thus spoiled the simplicity of faith.
- 1812 I. D'ISRAELI *Calamities of Authours* II. 331 Pope hesitated at deciding on the durability of his poetry.
- 1860 *All Year Round* 22 Sept. 567 You have..finally decided on the menu with your chef.
- 1941 P. HAMILTON *Hangover Square* IV. ii. 126 'No—this is my go,' said George, as the girl sat down, and when they had decided upon what they would have, he went to the bar to get it.
- 1967 S. TERKEL *Division Street* XXI. 360 If you don't decide about an issue, inevitably something will happen.
- 1977 J. LEES-MILNE *Through Wood & Dale* 1 Mar. (2001) 151 I asked how many and which rich persons would be selected to dine with HRH for this purpose—i.e., extracting money from them. He said, 'The computer will decide, of course'.
- 2013 *Daily Mirror* (Nexis) 16 Mar. 33 Deciding on what to wear to a wedding can be a nightmare.

**c. trans.** With clause as object, expressing the conclusion drawn. To conclude after consideration; to deduce. Also in passive with anticipatory *it*.

- 1584 R. COSIN *Answer to Two Fyrst & Principall Treat.* II. xviii. 336 The other place speketh not of

- dispensing, but of iudging, and decideth that there should lie none appellation.
- 1658 tr. B. Pascal *Les Provinciales* (ed. 2) Additional 93 Deciding that a tax imposed upon Merchandises is not just, it is lawfull for a man to use false weights to gaine the more.
- 1750 T. NUGENT tr. C.-L. de S. de Montesquieu *Spirit of Laws* II. xxviii. xxvi. 281 If the witness was overcome, it was decided, that the party had produced a false witness, and he lost his cause.
- 1798 *Trial P. Finerty* 36 Having decided the intention to be immaterial, it followed that the truth must be equally immaterial.
- 1883 'M. TWAIN' *Life on Mississippi* xxxi. 338 One of the two establishments where the Government keeps and watches corpses until the doctors decide that they are permanently dead.
- 1929 H. W. HAGGARD *Devils, Drugs, & Doctors* vi. 137 Upon consultation among medical men of Salerno, it was decided that the only means of extracting the poison which prevented the wound from healing was suction.
- 1955 T. WILLIAMS *Let.* 4 Sept. in *Five O'Clock Angel* (1991) 127 It seems to me that now the Horse has decided he never has to do anything in his life.
- 2005 *N.Y. Times* (National ed.) 20 Nov. iv. 13/1 Voters have decided the war is over.

**d. trans.** With infinitive, clause, or direct speech as object. To determine upon as a course of action; to resolve to do (something) or bring (something) about. Also in passive with anticipatory *it*.

The object of the verb in quot. 1692 is problematic: cf. the variant MS. reading.

- 1692 A. WOOD *Life & Times* (1894) III. 396 Several Presbyterians and Independents were at Cockrill's house and had *Athenae et Fasti Oxon* there in quires, where they decided to look up it [*MS.* they decided it to look up it].
- 1765 H. WALPOLE *Let.* 9 Mar. (1937) I. 90 I have decided that the outside shall be treillage.
- 1798 *Oracle & Daily Advertiser* 25 Dec. Commodore Duckworth..decided to pursue them.
- 1830 I. D'ISRAELI *Comm. Life Charles I* III. i. 8 An English monarch now decided to reign without a Parliament.
- 1865 *N.Y. Times* 22 Mar. 5/2 It was decided to organize a permanent association for the general benefit of the trade and the improvement of the typographic art.
- 1889 M. F. CUSACK *Nun of Kenmare* xxiv. 442 At Orkney I grew rapidly worse, and decided I must go back to Jersey City, even if I died on the way.
- 1900 G. HAGUE *Countess Helena* (ed. 2) xlv. 255 'I am going up to the top of that cathedral spire, or as far up as one can go,' she decided.
- 1921 A. A. MILNE *If I May* 19 I decided that no son of mine should become a curtain-pole manufacturer.
- 1967 T. W. BLACKBURN *Good Day to Die* iv. 37 Sitting Bull continued. 'It has been decided. We also will send two men to the country of the Fish Eaters'.
- 2012 *New Yorker* 10 Sept. 79/2 He recalled how, at eighteen, he decided to study architecture.

**e. intr.** Chiefly with *on*, *upon*, etc. To come to a firm decision with regard to future action or intention; to determine on or opt for something; to select something from several alternatives.

- 1778 F. BURNEY *Evelina* II. xv. 117 As to the *way* we should go; some were for a boat, others for a coach, and Mr. Branghton himself was for walking: but the boat, at length, was decided upon.
- 1785 T. JEFFERSON *Let.* 4 Nov. in *Papers* (1954) IX. 15 The Dollar was decided on as the Money unit of America.
- 1827 G. KENNEDY *Anna Ross* (new ed.) 63 I have decided on taking a pew either in St. George's Church, or in one of the Church of England Chapels.
- 1852 G. CURRIE *Insurance Agent's Assistant* xi. 79 What I now say to one, I emphatically say to all, who have not yet resolved upon action—Decide! decide! decide!
- 1887 C. J. ABBEY *Eng. Church & Bishops* II. 54 Butler soon after this decided against Nonconformity.
- 1895 'M. CORELLI' *Sorrows of Satan* v. 55 I give you just a day's grace to decide,—it must be yes or no in twenty-four hours!
- 1902 *Jewish Q. Rev.* 15 97 Modern scholars should have decided on the pronunciation 'Yahweh'.
- 1915 *Musical Monitor* June 496/2 I make a point never to read about the interpretation of the role by another artist..until I have fully decided upon my own interpretation.
- 1922 *Good Housek.* Feb. 149/1 He can't decide between us.
- 2010 *Your Cat* Feb. 7/2 We decided on Bengals after Mary had seen one, because they are just so beautiful.

## 2.

**a. trans.** To bring to an end (a controversy, argument, etc.) by finding in favour of one party; to pass judgement on (a dispute, etc.), to give a ruling on; to settle or resolve (a dispute, contention, etc.) by passing judgement.

- c1400 WYCLIF *Sel. Eng. Wks.* (1871) III. 429 Bifore þis cause were descided bytwene wyse men.
- 1484 CAXTON tr. *Subtyl Historyes & Fables Esope* 4 The cause came before the kyng to be decyded and pletyd.
- 1559 W. CUNINGHAM *Cosmogr. Glasse* 43 There is great controversie touching the Earthes fourme: which must be descided..or we can safely procede further.
- a1677 I. BARROW *Several Serm. Evil-speaking* (1678) i. 9 Advocates plead causes, and Judges decide them.
- 1796 J. MOSER *Hermit of Caucasus* I. 172 Are causes decided as speedy, and at as small an expence as possible?
- 1860 J. TYNDALL *Glaciers of Alps* I. xxiv. 170 The proper persons to decide the question.
- 1960 *Archery* ('Know the Game' Ser.) 23/1 A Judge or Field Captain is appointed in charge of all tournaments, and is responsible for deciding disputes which may arise concerning scores and shooting.
- 2012 *Tampa Bay (Florida) Times* (Nexis) 6 Jan. 10 A The administration dismissed the sessions as sham attempts to block Obama's nominees from taking their posts, and the courts likely will decide that disagreement.

**b. intr.** To give a decision, judgement, or ruling on a matter; *esp.* to

judge between parties in a dispute. Freq. with *for*, *against*, *between*, *in favour of*, etc.

- c1540 J. BELLENDEN tr. H. Boece *Hyst. & Cron. Scotl.* XIV. i. f. cciiii/2 He brocht certane resolute men out of france to decide on yis mater.
- 1672 G. MACKENZIE *Pleadings* 112 I hope, that when you have decided against him, he will heartily acquiesce to your Sentence.
- 1733 POPE *Of Use of Riches* 1 Who shall decide, when Doctors dis-agree?
- 1749 T. SMOLLETT *Regicide* II. ii. 17 Let Heaven decide Between me and my Foes.
- 1794 R. J. SULLIVAN *View of Nature* II. 265 To judge and to decide on the authority of historical monuments.
- 1844 F. MARRYAT *Privateersman* xvii. 124 You shall be the arbitress of her fate, and what you decide shall be irrevocable.
- 1930 J. H. JEANS *Universe around Us* (ed. 2) vi. 333 At present direct observation cannot definitely decide between the two conflicting hypotheses, but it rather frowns upon the 'steady stream' view of the stars.
- 1970 C. G. NOREÑA *Juan Luis Vives* 288 The judge decides according to the law, the procedural regulations, and the evidence of the case.
- 2014 *Times* (Nexis) 8 Aug. 32 If they do not decide in her favour, she will go to court.

**3. trans.** To exert a decisive influence on (an issue, situation, etc.); to determine the outcome of (a contest, etc.). Also occas. *intr.*

- 1592 J. LYLly *Midas* III. i. sig. C3 Let your minde be still of steele, and let the sharpest sword decide the right of Scepters.
- 1600 SHAKESPEARE *Henry IV, Pt. 2* IV. i. 182 Either end in peace..Or to the place of diffrence call the swords, Which must decide it.
- 1667 MILTON *Paradise Lost* VI. 303 Fit to decide the Empire of great Heav'n.
- 1738 H. BROOKE tr. Tasso *Jerusalem* II. 43 Henceforward let the Sword decide.
- 1787 A. HAWKINS tr. V. Mignot *Hist. Turkish Empire* II. 162 The address with which the Venetians, Spaniards, and all the confederates, worked their galleys, decided the battle in a very short time.
- 1819 W. HAZLITT in *Examiner* 7 Feb. 94/2 In the three first games, which of course decided the match, Peru got only one ace.
- 1866 tr. P. Guéranger *Life St. Cecilia* iv. 51 This memorable contest..decided the victory of the Romans over the Albans.
- 1909 in F. T. Jane *All World's Air-Ships* 327/3 'Air power' can hardly be more than one of many factors in deciding the issue of future wars.
- 1962 *N.Y. Times* 12 Nov. 25 Only 1,000,000 voters out of the nearly 5,800,000 who went to the polls in New York last Tuesday decided the outcome.
- 2013 *Daily Tel.* 18 Oct. 26/4 There is a word for this: gerontocracy, a system where countries are run for the benefit of the old because they tend to decide elections.

**4. trans.** To bring (a person, group, etc.) to a decision; to cause to

## resolve or determine.

- 1604 N. BRETON *Passionate Shepherd* (1877) sig. D3 Her censure onely shall decide me: What I protest in euerie parte.
- 1710 R. STEELE *Tatler* No. 141. ¶2 Have agreed to be decided by your Judgment.
- 1827 R. SOUTHEY *Select. from Lett.* (1856) IV. 463 This 'Tasso' came in good time to decide me in a matter upon which I was hesitating.
- 1893 *New Eng. Mag.* Sept. 88/2 His 'sober second thought' decided him to face the music, confess his fault and make the best of it.
- 1921 J. GALSWORTHY *To Let* 231 Our names were publicly joined. That decided us, and we became united in fact.
- 2006 *Place in Sun* May 90/1 What decided him on his final decision was that property in this part of the world seemed to stack up as a good investment.

## †II. To cut off.

5. *trans.* To cut off or separate *from*. *Obs. rare.*

Spellings in *dis-* in this meaning have been treated at DISCIDE *v.*

- 1570 R. EDWARDES *Boke Very Godly Psalmes* i. 16 Circumsise our harts with thy grace, that beinge decided from this witching world: we may wholly cleaue vnto thee.
- 1587 A. FLEMING et al. *Holinshed's Chron.* (new ed.) III. 1290/1 Againe, our seat denies our traffike heere, The sea too neare decides vs from the rest.

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