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## dictate, *v.*

**Pronunciation:** Brit. /dɪk'teɪt/, U.S. /'dɪk,tet/

**Forms:** 15– **dictate**, 16 **dictat**; also *Sc.* pre-17 **dictat** (past tense), pre-17 **dictat** (past participle).

**Frequency (in current use):**

**Origin:** A borrowing from Latin. **Etymons:** Latin *dictāt-*, *dictāre*.

**Etymology:** < classical Latin *dictāt-*, past participial stem (see *-ATE suffix*<sup>3</sup>) of *dictāre* to say habitually or repeatedly, to indicate (matter to be written down), to compose, draw up, to prescribe, order, a frequentative formation < *dīcere* to say, tell (see *DICTUM n.*). Compare Middle French, French *dicter* to state or express in the form of words which are to be written down, to compose, draft (14th cent.), to prescribe, stipulate (14th cent.), Old Occitan *dictar* to say, to pronounce, to compose, to prescribe; and also Catalan *dictar* (14th cent.), Spanish *dictar* (13th cent.), Portuguese *ditar* (14th cent.), Italian *dettare*, (now arch.) *dittare* (a1292), also Middle Dutch, Dutch *dicteren* (15th cent.), German *diktieren* (15th cent.), all in sense 'to dictate (a text)' and in most cases also in sense 'to specify, prescribe'.

Most sources until the late 19th cent. indicate only stress on the first syllable. *N.E.D.* (1895) gives the pronunciation as (diktēˈt, di-ktēˈt) /dɪk'teɪt/, /'dɪkter/. Stress on the second syllable is usual in British sources from the early 20th cent. onwards.

### 1.

**a. trans.** To state or express in the form of words which are to be written down; to say or read aloud (matter which is to be transcribed).

- 1577 R. DAVIES *Funerall Serm.* sig. C.iii This celestiall Charter, dictated by the sonne of God, and written by the Disciple beloued of Christ Iohn the Apostle and Euangelist.
- 1581 G. PETTIE tr. S. Guazzo *Ciuile Conuersat.* (1586) II. 59 Like a schoolemaister, which doth dictate or rehearse to his schollers some Theame or Epistle.
- 1612 J. BRINSLEY *Ludus Lit.* x. 151 You are to dictate, or deliuer vnto them word by word, the English of the sentence.
- 1654 J. BRAMHALL *Just Vindic. Church of Eng.* vi. 130 A Book..not penned, but dictated by such as know right well the most secret Cabales, and Intriques of the Conclave.
- 1708 tr. *Turkish Tales* 242 The Grand Visier being ready, the Sultan dictated the following Words.
- 1791 J. BOSWELL *Life Johnson* anno 1753 I. 137 [A. Williams:] He dictated them, while Bathurst wrote.
- 1845 J. H. NEWMAN in *Encycl. Metropolitana* X. 283/1 He [*sc.* Cicero] used to dictate his thoughts to his scribes.
- 1856 B. BRODIE *Psychol. Inq.* (ed. 3) I. iv. 126 During his last illness..he dictated an account of some scientific observations.
- 1913 E. FERBER *Roast Beef Medium* i. 9 I'm going to dictate two letters, explaining why business was rotten last week, and why it's going to pick up next week.
- 1965 A. LURIE *Nowhere City* xii. 123 I wonder if I could dictate a couple more letters then, while we wait?
- 2006 *Church Times* 25 Aug. 23/3 His laptop broke down and he had to file the old way, dictating his

copy down the phone with no time to think.

**b. intr.** To speak or read in this way; to give dictation.

- 1592 J. DEE *Autobiogr. Tracts* ii. 7 in *Chetham Misc.* (1851) I I did also dictate upon every proposition, beside the first exposition.
- 1633 G. HERBERT *Posie* in *Temple* ii Whether I sing, Or say, or dictate, this is my delight.
- 1667 MILTON *Paradise Lost* IX. 23 My Celestial Patroness, who..dictates to me slumbring.
- 1724 SWIFT *Let. to Molesworth* p. iv My Custom is..to Dictate to a 'Prentice who can write in a Feigned Hand.
- a1774 A. TUCKER *Light of Nature Pursued* (1777) III. III. 370 Cesar could dictate to three amanuenses together.
- 1823 *Times* 9 Apr. 3/5 He was apparently dictating to some person who was writing for him.
- 1858 'G. ELIOT' *Janet's Repentance* vii, in *Scenes Clerical Life* II. 153 Mr Dempster placed himself near her..and..began to dictate.
- 1902 W. B. YEATS *Let.* 18 Apr. (1994) III. 175 I am working at my novel—dictating to a type writer.
- 1960 A. L. ROWSE *Diary* 1 Oct. (2003) 326 He was talking into a dictaphone or long-distance phone, dictating to a secretary.
- 2000 K. ATKINSON *Emotionally Weird* (2001) 360 Watson Grant's door..was open to reveal a group of bored students to whom he was dictating like an old-fashioned dominie.

†**2. trans.** To express, indicate. *Obs. rare.*

- 1599 S. DANIEL *Complaint Rosamond* (new ed.) in *Poet. Ess.* sig. Ee4 Eu'ry corner of that hatefull place Dictates mine error [*printed etror*], and reueales disgrace.
- 1638 R. BRATHWAIT tr. J. de Gruytrode in *Spiritual Spicerie* 156 Not the least sprig, seed, or grasse-pile, but retained in it a mysterious impression of so exquisite an Artist: yet with what an easie contempt and perfunctory reflex, hee lookes on these, as if they dictated nothing to him but a vading vanity?
- 1638 T. HERBERT *Some Yeares Trav.* (rev. ed.) 182 Left them with a frowne, dictating their base carriage and my impatience.

†**3. trans.** To state or declare authoritatively; to utter as a pronouncement or dictum. Also *fig.* *Obs.*

- 1606 G. CHAPMAN *Gentleman Vsher* II. sig. C2<sup>v</sup> Good master Vsher, will you dictate to me, Which is the part precedent of this night-cap, And which posterior?
- 1621 R. BURTON *Anat. Melancholy* III. IV. I. ii. 729 Our owne conscience doth dictate so much vnto vs.
- 1752 JOHNSON *Rambler* No. 196. ¶6 He will..dictate axioms to posterity.
- 1781 W. COWPER *Truth* 513 Of all that Wisdom dictates, this the drift.

**4.**

**a. trans.** To prescribe (what is to be done); to determine or lay down as being obligatory or necessary; to require as an imperative; to stipulate (a course of action, the terms of an agreement, etc.). Also: to make a stipulation or determination in respect of (something).

In quot. 1637: to recommend the use of (a medicinal substance); = PRESCRIBE *v.* 3a.

- 1624 D. FEATLEY *Romish Fisher Caught* sig. H2\* It is an easie and sweet kind of teaching, for a man that is safe himselfe..from a high wall to dictate strokes, & poynt out to a souldier in the Field, where he should smite his aduersarie.
- 1637 J. SHIRLEY *Gamester* III. i Your learned physician dictates ambergrease.
- 1651 T. HOBBS *Leviathan* II. xxx. 185 The same Law, that dictateth to men..what they ought to do.
- 1699 C. HOPKINS *Court-prospect* i. 14 He meditates, and dictates Europe's Fate.
- 1725 I. WATTS *Logick* II. v. §6 God can dictate nothing but what is worthy of himself.
- 1766 O. GOLDSMITH *Vicar of Wakefield* II. xii. 192 I find his present prosecution was dictated by tyranny, cowardice and revenge.
- 1781 GIBBON *Decline & Fall* II. xxxiv. 264 They dictated the conditions of peace.
- 1799 S. ROGERS *Epist. to Friend* (new ed.) 53 Her prudence dictates what her pride disdain'd.
- 1838 C. THIRLWALL *Hist. Greece* V. xlv. 355 Thus both were decreed..on the terms dictated by Philip.
- 1878 T. H. HUXLEY *Physiogr.* (ed. 2) Pref. It appeared to me to be plainly dictated by common sense.
- 1891 *Speaker* 2 May 532/2 The Socialist no longer thinks of dictating to society what it ought to be.
- 1948 A. C. KINSEY et al. *Sexual Behavior Human Male* x. 365 Public sentiment, backed by sporadic police action, has dictated the styles of bathing suits.
- 1967 *Guardian* 11 July 6/5 The idea that the Israelis are anxious to..dictate a Carthaginian peace is ludicrously wide of the mark.
- 1976 *National Observer* (U.S.) 14 Aug. 4/1 The iron rule of business dictates staying open anytime there's a decent chance to turn a profit.
- 2004 R. WEITZ *Rapunzel's Daughters* Introd. p. xv Prior to the colonization of Polynesia by Europeans, Tikopia tribal custom dictated that women have short hair.

**b. intr.** To make a prescription, stipulation, or ruling; to lay down the law; to give orders, be in command.

- a1628 N. CARPENTER *Achitophel* (1629) 38 As though God could not as well direct our studie, as strengthen our deliuerie; and there were not a place as well for attention to follow, as inuention to dictate in our Deuotion.
- 1651 T. HOBBS *Philos. Rudim.* vii. §8. 125 We have seen how Subjects, nature dictating, have oblig'd themselves..to obey the Supreme Power.
- 1728 POPE *Dunciad* II. 331 To caviil, censure, dictate, right or wrong.
- 1755 E. YOUNG *Centaur* iii, in *Wks.* (1757) IV. 176 Did this poor, pallid, scarce-animated mass dictate in the cabinet of pleasure?
- 1807 *Salmagundi* 24 Feb. 58 He is the oracle of the family, dictates to his sisters on every occasion.
- 1871 'G. ELIOT' *Middlemarch* (1872) I. i. ix. 122 A woman dictates before marriage in order that she

may have an appetite for submission afterwards.

- 1931 J. T. ADAMS *Epic of Amer.* vii. 185 There he was, rich as Croesus, and dictating to the government.
- 1961 *Times* 9 Feb. 13/5 It is a quite intolerable invasion of individual liberty of conscience that any third party should seek to dictate to a woman on a matter of such importance.
- 1991 R. P. FORMISANO *Boston against Busing* ii. 36 Once again outsiders, no longer mainly Yankee or rural, were dictating to Boston's untrustworthy Irish about how to run their city.

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## DERIVATIVES

### dic'tated *adj.*

- 1611 R. COTGRAVE *Dict. French & Eng. Tongues* *Dicté*, dictated, indicted.
- 1796 E. INCHBALD *Nature & Art* I. xi. 62 He walked into the room, not with a dictated obeisance, but with a hurrying step, a half pleased, yet a half frightened look, [etc.].
- 1823 J. NEAL *Randolph* II. 186 The very language that his mother taught him, when he fell upon his little knees, and lisped the dictated prayer after her, syllable by syllable.
- 1924 *Elem. School Jرنl.* 24 586 Writing on the board his dictated contributions while we build up sufficient word power to make individual written composition work possible.
- 2000 A. RASHID *Taliban* (2001) 196 For nearly 20 years since the Islamic revolution, Tehran's women had shrouded themselves in the dictated garb of *hijab*.

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