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differ, *v.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /'dɪfə/, U.S. /'dɪfər/

Forms: lME–15 **dyffer**, lME–15 **dyffere**, lME–15 **dyfferre**, lME–16 **differre**, lME– **differ**, 15 **defer**, 15 **dyffre**, 15 (18– Eng. regional (south.)) **deffer**, 16 **differr**; Sc. pre-17 **defer**, pre-17 **deffirrid** (past participle), pre-17 17– **differ**.

Frequency (in current use):

Origin: Of multiple origins. Partly a borrowing from French. Partly a borrowing from Latin. **Etymons:** French *defferer*; Latin *differre*.

Etymology: < (i) Middle French *defferer*, *differer* (French *différer*) to have different or distinguishing qualities or features, to be different or dissimilar (1314 in Old French), to distinguish (one thing) from (another) (c1341; end of the 13th cent. in sense ‘to delay, postpone’: see DEFER *v.*¹),

and its etymon (ii) classical Latin *differre* to carry away in different directions, to scatter, disperse, to separate, to bewilder, distract, to spread abroad, publish, to postpone, defer, to keep (someone) waiting, (intransitive) to be different, to disagree < *dif-* DIF- prefix + *ferre* to bear, carry (see BEAR *v.*¹).

Compare Old Occitan *defeir*, *differre* (15th cent. or earlier), Catalan *diferir* (1495 in senses corresponding to those of the English verb; 14th cent. or earlier in sense ‘to delay, postpone’), Spanish *diferir* (16th cent. in senses corresponding to those of the English verb; 15th cent. in sense ‘to delay, postpone’), Portuguese *diferir* (1572 in senses corresponding to those of the English verb; 1552 in sense ‘to delay, postpone’), Italian *differire* (1516 in senses corresponding to those of the English verb; 14th cent. in sense ‘to delay, postpone’).

This verb is etymologically identical with DEFER *v.*¹ Use in the senses ‘to delay, postpone, to set aside’ and related meanings has gradually become distinguished in both pronunciation (especially the position of the main stress) and spelling, so that modern English has two entirely distinct verbs. The selection of forms with stress on the first syllable for the meanings recorded at this entry may have been partly determined by their close association with DIFFERENT *adj.* and DIFFERENCE *n.*¹ (Another factor may have been association with OFFER *v.* and SUFFER *v.*, although the etymons of these verbs have a different form in French and in the other Romance languages. With DEFER *v.*¹ compare CONFER *v.*, REFER *v.*, PREFER *v.*)

In sense 2b after DIFFERENCE *n.*¹ 5c.

1. intr. To have different or distinguishing qualities or features; to be dissimilar, different, or distinct in nature, form, or qualities in a particular respect.

Two or more things are said to differ *from one another*, and one thing is said to differ *from another*.

?c1400 (►c1380) [implied in: CHAUCER tr. Boethius *De Consol. Philos.* (BL Add. 10340) (1868) v. pr. v. l.

4892 Dyuerse and differyng substancies. (at DIFFERING *adj.* 1)].

?a1425 tr. Guy de Chauliac *Grande Chirurgie* (N.Y. Acad. Med.) f. 20^v (MED) It makeþ it forto differre, or for to be different [L. *differre*], fro euery oper þing.

- c1450 (►?a1400) *Wars Alexander* (Ashm.) l. 4617 Bot we þat..has a fre will Differris as in oure
fraunches fere fra ȝoure kynde.
- a1513 J. IRLAND *Meroure of Wyssdome* (1926) I. 62 This maner of knawlage deferris mekle fra oure
maner.
- 1526 W. BONDE *Pylgrimage of Perfection* III. sig. OOOiii This differeth fro that other, as..the rose
differeth frome the budde.
- a1616 SHAKESPEARE *As you like It* (1623) I. i. 9 Call you that keeping for a gentleman of my birth, that
differs not from the stalling of an Ox?
- a1699 W. TEMPLE *Ess. Pop. Discontents* in *Wks.* (1720) I. 270 'Tis hard to find any point wherein they
differ.
- 1728 E. CHAMBERS *Cycl. at Sugar* Strain'd or Brown Sugar..does not differ much from the crude
Sugar.
- 1774 O. GOLDSMITH *Hist. Earth* III. 324 It [sc. the fox]..differs still more from the dog in its strong
offensive smell.
- 1847 A. HELPS *Friends in Council* I. ii. 27 Even the leaves of the same tree are said to differ, each one
from all the rest.
- 1875 B. JOWETT in tr. Plato *Dialogues* (ed. 2) IV. 32 Man is not man in that he resembles [brutes], but
in that he differs from them.
- 1886 *Birmingham Daily Post* 28 July 4/6 The county government which is carried on by the grand
jury system in Ireland differs absolutely from the functions of the Quarter Sessions in England.
- 1951 G. GREENE *End of Affair* II. ii. 63 If we had believed in sin, our behaviour would hardly have
differed.
- 2012 *Tustin (Calif.) News* 15 Nov. 12 (advt.) The age at which the first tooth appears differs greatly
from child to child.

2. *trans.*

- a.** To distinguish; to set apart or separate with respect to one or more qualities; to make dissimilar, different, or distinct.

- c1450 (►?a1400) *Wars Alexander* (Ashm.) l. 4223 ȝour manars fra all othire mens so mekill ere
deffirrid.
- 1548 N. UDALL et al. tr. Erasmus *Paraphr. Neue Test.* I. Luke xiii. f. cxx The mercifulnesse of God
differeth them vpon hope of repentaunce.
- 1562 G. LEGH *Accedens of Armory* f. 56 This is not vnylike y^e other crosse. The pike which it hath to
pitch into the grounde, onely differeth it.
- 1603 C. HEYDON *Def. Iudicall Astrol.* v. 158 Homo, and Brutum..differ the whole kind.
- a1655 R. ROBINSON *Christ All* (1656) 44 Garments..differ one sex from another.
- 1714 J. PETIVER in *Philos. Trans.* 1713 (Royal Soc.) 28 213 Its glaucous Leaves and pale Flowers, differ
it from the yellow Split.
- 1752 *Charms of Beauty* 11 Wit and good Sense are equally their Due, Their Colour only differs them
from you.
- 1818 W. CRUISE *Digest Laws Eng. Real Prop.* (ed. 2) IV. 510 That differed it from the cases wherein
the Court had gone some lengths.
- 1867 H. BUSHNELL *Moral Uses Dark Things* 36 All which differs the landscape in beauty from mere

wild forest.

- 1914 *Southeastern Reporter* 79 22/2 I place the decision of this case on its facts and circumstances differing it from those cases.

- 1985 V.N. LUKASH & I. D. NOVIKOV in M. A. H. MacCallum *Galaxies, Axisymmetric Syst. & Relativity* 35 It is the locality of potential perturbations that differs them principally from gravitational waves.

- 2012 J. B. HAILE in R. E. Birt *Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.* iii. 77 It is Jesus' reconciliation of the world that differs him from philosophical muses of the Greeks and Romans.

†b. Heraldry. To distinguish a coat of arms by means of a difference (DIFFERENCE n.¹ 5c). *Obs. rare.*

- 1586 J. FERNE *Blazon of Gentrie* 98 Til then it was permissiue for eche brother to differ his coat after his fancye.

3.

a. intr. Of a person, or two or more people: to hold different opinions or beliefs regarding a particular matter; to disagree. Frequently with *with, from*.

- 1563 N. WINSET *Certain Tractates* (1888) I. 135 Sen 3e..differis fra ws..tweching the said day of the moneth.

- 1653 I. WALTON *Compl. Angler* ii. 42 The question has been debated among many great Clerks, and they seem to differ about it.

- 1716 J. ADDISON *Free-Holder* No. 19 To irritate those who differ with you in their Sentiments.

- 1749 H. FIELDING *Tom Jones* I. III. v. 181 Many People differed from Square and Thwackum, in judging [etc.] .

- 1833 J. H. NEWMAN *Lett. & Corr.* (1891) I. 466 To unite with those who differ with us.

- 1885 *Law Rep.: Appeal Cases* 10 379 The appellant and respondents differ as to when the gate was erected.

- 1903 *Monitor & New Era* 24 Nov. 9/2 We have differed from some of those around us as to the best means of achieving this object.

- 1938 D. C. PEATTIE *Prairie Grove* vii. 38 It was on this point that Father Prud'homme differed so widely from his coreligionist.

- 2005 B. FARMER *Amer. Conservatism* vii. 128 Conservatives differed with the Revolutionaries over which segment of society was the greatest threat to liberty.

b. intr. To dispute, argue, or quarrel; to express disagreement or a difference of opinion.

- 1568 (►a1508) W. KENNEDY *Flyting* (Bannatyne) in *Poems W. Dunbar* (1998) I. 209 Quhen Bruce and Balioll differit for the croun, Scottis lordis could nocht obey Inglis lawis.

- 1577 W. FULKE *Overthrow & Confut. Doctr. Purgatory* Pref. 13 in *Two Treat. against Papistes* In y^e substance of which point I will no[t] differ with you, yet something will I note in your handling thereof, as occasion moueth me.
- 1625 BACON *Ess.* (new ed.) 15 A man..shall sometimes heare Ignorant Men differ, and know well..that those which so differ, meane one thing.
- 1709 T. HEARNE *Remarks & Coll.* (1886) II. 245 As they went out of Town they happen'd to differ.
- 1740 H. BRACKEN *Farriery Improv'd* (ed. 2) II. vi. 118 As to his Size, I would have him full Fifteen Hands, nay, I would not differ for his being Sixteen, provided he was strong in Proportion.
- 1857 *Illustr. London News* 14 Mar. 237/3 The Stanhope Committee differed loudly and vehemently on the propriety of admitting a portrait of James Boswell into the collection.
- 1894 *Our Paper* 3 Mar. 144/1 The two men differed angrily.
- 1906 J. BENNETT *Treasure of Peyre Gaillard* xvii. 135 Don't differ with me; it does no good. I've no strength to waste in idle temper.
- 1952 *Jet* 29 May 3 The encounter..came off with no open clash although the two have differed violently on the U.S. Negro's relation to Russia.
- 2006 C. BERENS *Chuck Hagel* viii. 193 Hegel voted to authorize the Iraq war even though he differed loudly with the administration over the conduct of and follow-up to hostilities.

[†]c. trans. Sc. To cause disagreement between (two or more people); to set at variance. Obs. rare⁻¹.

- 1814 C. I. JOHNSTONE *Saxon & Gaël* I. vi. 79 If Maister Angis and her mak it up, I'se ne'er be the man to differ them.

PHRASES

P1. to beg to differ (also **to beg leave to differ**): to hold or put forward a different opinion; (in later use also) to disagree. Also formerly in [†]**to crave (leave) to differ** and variants.

Originally used in the first person (as in, e.g., *I beg to differ*) as an expression of deference or respect.

- 1644 K. DIGBY *Two Treat.* I. xxxii. 276 I shall craue leaue to differ from him [sc. Descartes], in determining what is the subiect of this motion.
- 1660 J. BELLAMY tr. Origen *Against Celsus* II. xv. 62 Here I must beg Leave to differ from him [sc. Celsus].
- 1732 SWIFT *Proposal to pay off Debt of Nation* in *Considerations Two Bills* (new ed.) 31 The Bulk of the Tenants..look upon it both as an unnatural and iniquitous thing that Bishops should be Owners of Land at all; (wherein I beg to differ from them).
- 1792 *Bee* 25 Jan. 145 I here most humbly beg and crave To differ, Sir, from you.
- 1846 C. G. F. GORE *Sketches Eng. Char.* I. 343 He 'begged leave to differ from us entirely'; which means that he differed from us *toto cælo* without leave given or taken.

- 1899 A. T. SADLIER *True Story Master Gerard* (1900) ix. 72 I crave to differ with the worshipful Colonel Bayard in underestimating the enemy.
- 1928 *Financial Times* 2 Nov. 13/5 I gave my own views, based on yours, but he begged to differ.
- 1950 *Pacific Hist. Rev.* 19 185 The publisher asserts: '*Farthest Frontier* is a splendid social and cultural history of the Northwest.' This reviewer begs leave to differ.
- 1989 T. KESSNER *F. H. La Guardia & Making Mod. N.Y.* ix. 326 The mayor wrote back, begging to differ.
- 2014 *Times* 2 July (T2 section) 7 Oh, is that so? Well, I beg to differ.

P2. *to agree to differ*: see AGREE *v.* Phrases 2.

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