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idiot, *n.* and *adj.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /'ɪdɪət/, U.S. /'ɪdiət/

Forms: ME **idyothe**, ME **ydiott**, ME **ydiotte**, ME–15 **ideotte**, ME–15 **idiott**, ME–15 **idyote**, ME–15 **ydeot**, ME–15 **ydeote**, ME–15 **ydeotte**, ME–15 **ydiote**, ME–15 **ydyot**, ME–15 **ydyote**, ME–16 **ideote**, ME–16 **idiote**, ME–16 **idyot**, ME–16 **ydiot**, ME–18 **ideot**, ME– **idiot**, 15 **ediote**, 15 **idiotte**, 16 **ideott**, 16 **ideote**, 18 **idget** (*nonstandard*); *U.S. regional* 18 **ijit**, 19– **ediot**, 19– **idjit**, 19– **iggiot**, 19– **ijjit**, 19– **ijjut**; *Sc.* pre-17 **ideot**, pre-17 **idiott**, pre-17 **ydeot**, pre-17 **ydeote**, pre-17 **ydiot**, pre-17 17– **idiot**, 18 **idewit**, 18 **idowit**, 18 **idywit**, 19– **idiwut**. See also EEJIT *n.*, NIDGET *n.*¹, NIDIOT *n.*

Frequency (in current use):

Origin: Of multiple origins. Partly a borrowing from French. Partly a borrowing from Latin. **Etymons:** French *ideot*; Latin *idiōta*, Greek *ιδιώτης*.
Etymology: < Anglo-Norman *ideot*, *ideote*, *idyot*, *ydeot*, Anglo-Norman and Old French, Middle French *idiote*, *ydiote*, Anglo-Norman and Middle French *idiot*, *ydiot*, *ydeote* (French *idiot*) (noun) uneducated, ignorant person (1164), stupid person, mentally deficient person (c1374), (adjective) ignorant, uneducated (c1224), foolish, stupid, incapable of reasoning (c1300), (of behaviour, appearance, etc., of a person) characteristic of an idiot or idiocy (1612) and its etymons classical Latin *idiōta* (in post-classical Latin also *ideota*, *ydeota*, *ydiota*, etc.) ordinary person, layman, amateur, private individual, in post-classical Latin also recent convert (Vulgate), ignorant, uneducated person (early 3rd cent. in Tertullian), professional fool or jester (12th cent. in a British source), stupid person, mentally deficient person (from 13th cent. in British sources) and ancient Greek *ιδιώτης* private person, person without professional knowledge, layman, ignorant, ill-informed person, in Hellenistic Greek also common man, plebeian < *ἴδιος* private, own, peculiar (see IDIO- *comb. form*) + *-ώτης* -OTE suffix. Compare Catalan *idiota* (15th cent.), Spanish *idiota* (a1450; early 14th cent. as *ydiota*), Portuguese *idiota* (first half of the 16th cent.; 15th cent. as *yndiota*), Italian *idiota* (a1306 in sense 'uneducated person', a1388 in sense 'stupid person'). The Latin word was also borrowed into other Germanic languages; compare e.g. Middle Dutch *ydiot* not fully developed person (c1330; Dutch *idiot* stupid person (1562 as *†idiot*)), Middle Low German *īdeōt*, *īdiōt*, German *Idiot* (early 16th cent. in sense 'uneducated, ignorant person', 18th cent. in sense 'bungler', 19th cent. in sense 'stupid, intellectually subnormal person' (which is now the usual sense, and is probably after English)), Swedish *idiot* (early 17th cent.). Compare IDIOTA *n.*, a later independent borrowing of the Latin noun. Compare EEJIT *n.*, and (with metanalysis: see N *n.*) NIDIOT *n.*, NIDGET *n.*¹ The latter shows assimilation of /dj/ to /dʒ/, which is also seen in the regional and nonstandard spelling *idget*.

A. n.

1.

a. A person without learning; an ignorant, uneducated person;
 Now *arch.* and *rare*.

[With reference to the Apostles (see quotes. c1384, c1450) ultimately after ancient Greek layman' (so in Acts 4:13, the passage translated in quot. c1384).]

- †c1384 *Bible* (Wycliffite, E.V.) (Douce 369(2)) (1850) Deeds iv. 13 Forsoth thei seyng the stedfastnesse of Petre and John, founden that thei weren men with oute lettris, and idiotis [a1425 *L.V.* men vnlettrid, and lewid men; *L. homines..sine litteris et idiotæ*], wondriden.
- c1400 (†c1378) LANGLAND *Piers Plowman* (Laud 581) (1869) B. XVI. l. 170 (*MED*) I..3ede forth as an ydiote in contre to aspye After Pieres þe plowman.
- c1450 J. CAPGRAVE *Life St. Katherine* (Arun. 396) (1893) l. l. 288 (*MED*) Ryght as be twelue ydiotes, sent Austyn seyth—he meneth the apostellis, for thei not lerned were—Thurgh-ovte þe world was sowen ovr feyth.
- 1483 CAXTON tr. J. de Voragine *Golden Legende* 287/1 The bisshop repreuyd hym sore as unconnyng and an ydeote.
- 1549 T. CHALONER tr. Erasmus *Praise of Folie* 8 He preferred also the Ideote, and simple vulgars, before other learned and reputed persons.
- 1577 H. I. tr. H. Bullinger *50 Godlie Serm.* I. i. iii. sig. B.iiij/2 A most common kind of speach, wherwithall euen the very idiotes were acquainted.
- 1606 *Wily Beguilde* 18 Hees a verie idiot and Browne bread Clowne.
- 1647 H. MORE *Philos. Poems* Pref. sig. B3^v It would be safer to ask the judgement of young lads or Countrey idiots..then those lubricous Wits and overworn Philosophers.
- 1657 (*title*) The deuine loue, or the saintly ideots deuotions.
- 1698 J. FRYER *New Acct. E.-India & Persia* 374 I..confess my self an Ideot, understanding no other Language than Turkish.
- 1722 J. COVEL *Some Acct. Greek Church* 353 There is also this very remarkable passage in the Cardinal; Idiote qui vident Picturas, Ideots who see these Pictures [etc.].
- 1906 *Daily Chron.* 6 Dec. 6/6 Mr. Hamilton Fyfe's use of 'idiot' to mean simply an ordinary man, in calling Shakespeare an 'inspired idiot', is unjustifiable in the twentieth century in which Mr. Fyfe happens to live.

Cross Reference

idiota, n.

A simple, ordinary person; a person without learning. Cf. IDIOT *n.* 1. Now *hist.*

b. †(a) A person without professional training or skill (*obs.*); (b) a private (as opposed to a public) person, an inward-looking person (now *rare*).

- a1400 tr. Lanfranc *Sci. Chirurgie* (Ashm.) (1894–1988) 69 (*MED*) But þe modir of þat child sente for a lewde leche [L. *layco*]..Panne a fisician..blamede þe modir & hir freendis þat þei hadden left counseil for þilke idiotis biheeste.
- 1638 F. JUNIUS *Painting of Ancients* 75 If any one should bid an idiot take the instruments and mend what he blameth in the Artificers, he should never be able to doe it.
- 1651 BP. J. TAYLOR *Clerus Domini* 54 In the form of Ideots and private persons.
- 1663 R. BOYLE *Some Considerations Usefulnessse Exper. Nat. Philos.* I. 17 Idiots admire in things the Beauty of their Materials, but Artists that of the Workmanship.
- 1962 W. H. AUDEN *Dyer's Hand* (1963) 437 Next comes the social 'idiot' in the Greek sense, the individual whose life is as conditioned by one personal overriding interest as the conventional individual's is by social habit.

†c. *spec.* A layman. *Obs.*

- ?c1430 (►c1400) *Rule St. Francis* (Corpus Cambr.) in F. D. Matthew *Eng. Wks. Wyclif* (1880) 46 We dwelten to-gidre in chirchis, & weren idiotis & vnderloute to ale men.
- 1611 H. GOODIER in T. Coryate *Crudities* sig. c6 For he would not Take orders, but remaine an Idiote.
- 1638 D. FEATLEY *Stricturæ in Lyndomastygem* I. 158 in H. Lynde *Case for Spectacles* That hee that supplieth the place of the idiot or laye-man in answering for the people shall understand.
- 1660 BP. J. TAYLOR *Ductor Dubitantium* I. I. ii. Rule 2 §5 The holy and innocent ideot, or plain easy people of the Laity.

2.

a. Chiefly *Law* and *Psychiatry*. A person so profoundly disabled in mental function or intellect as to be incapable of ordinary acts of reasoning or rational conduct; *spec.* a person permanently so affected, as distinguished from one with a temporary severe mental illness. Now *hist.* in technical use.

By the older legal authorities in England an idiot was defined as a person congenitally deficient in reasoning powers (cf. quot. 1590), and this remained for a long time the common implication of the term.

- a1400 (►a1325) *Cursor Mundi* (Vesp.) l. 10456 Þou sais to me als til a sott, Haldes þou me for ani idiot [Gött. a fole]?
- c1415 (►c1395) CHAUCER *Wife of Bath's Tale* (Corpus Oxf.) (1872) ProL. l. 311 Wenestow make an ydyot of oure dame?
- c1425 *Bk. Found. St. Bartholomew's* (1923) 13 (*MED*) He made and feyned hym-self vnwyse..and owtward pretendid the cheyr of an ydiotte.
- 1440 *Promptorium Parvulorum* (Harl. 221) 258/2 Idyote, nether fowle ne ryghte wyce [?a1475 *Winch*. Idyothe, 1499 *Pyynson* Idyote, halfe innocent], *idiota*.
- 1549 T. CHALONER tr. Erasmus *Praise of Folie* sig. Gij This kynde of men whom comunly ye call foolles, doltes, ideotes, and paches [L. *quos uulgo moriones, stultos, fatuos, ac bliteos appellat*].
- 1578 J. BANISTER *Hist. Man* VIII. f. 98^v Idiotes and foolish bodyes, who hauyng defect in this [sc. reason], are lame in all the rest.
- 1590 H. SWINBURNE *Briefe Treat. Test. & Willes* II. f. 39 An Idiote, or a naturall foole is he, who notwithstanding he bee of lawfull age, yet he is so witlesse, that hee can not number to twentie, nor can tell what age he is of, nor knoweth who is his father, or mother, nor is able to answer to any such easie question.
- 1615 G. SANDYS *Relation of Journey* 56 They haue..naturall idiots, in high veneration; as men rauished in spirit, and taken from themselues, as it were, to the fellowship of Angels.
- 1628 E. COKE *1st Pt. Inst. Lawes Eng.* I. 135 b When an Ideot doth sue or defend, he shall not appeare by Gardeine or Procheine Amy.
- 1690 J. LOCKE *Ess. Humane Understanding* II. xi. 71 Idiots make very few or no Propositions, and reason scarce at all.
- 1706 *Phillips's New World of Words* (new ed.) *Gard* or *Guard*..In a Law-sense Guardianship or Management of Children under Age or Idiots.
- 1735 B. MOTTE in *Swift's Lett.* (1768) IV. 107 An Hospital for Lunaticks and Idiots.
- 1793 T. HOLCROFT tr. J. C. Lavater *Ess. Physiognomy* (abridged ed.) lii. 247 Who can explain wherein consists the difference of organization between an ideot and another man?
- 1847 TROLLOPE *Macdermots* III. xi. 424 Larry was..then, and always afterwards a confirmed idiot.
- 1868 *Stephen's New Comm. Laws Eng.* (ed. 6) II. II. II. v. 63 Persons *insane* (in which class are..to be included idiots who have had no understanding from their birth, as well as lunatics who..have lost the use of their reason).

- 1893 *Westm. Gaz.* 19 Apr. 2/3 Idiots, especially microcephales, have flattened retreating foreheads.
- 1937 *Arch. Neurol. & Psychiatry (Chicago)* 38 731 Onufrowicz first described this fiber stratum as the occipitofrontal fasciculus in the brain of a microcephalic idiot.
- 1997 A. DEWDNEY *Yes we have no Neutrons* ii. 32 One level above imbeciles, morons occupied a gray area between idiots and imbeciles on the one hand, and fully competent people on the other.

b. A person who speaks or acts in what the speaker considers an irrational way, or with extreme stupidity or foolishness. *colloq.*

- c1480 (†a1400) *St. Theodora* 148 in W. M. Metcalfe *Legends Saints Sc. Dial.* (1896) II. 103 Wenand I ware sic ydiot, þat þu suld wit my priuete.
- 1547 *Certain Serm. or Homilies* sig. Tj^v Shall I be suche an idiot and diserde to suffre euery man to speake vpon me, what thei list.
- ?1555 COVERDALE tr. O. Werdmueller *Treat. Death* III. iii. 210 O thou great ydiote, thou lamentest, that thy name and honoure perysheth in thys transytorye worlde.
- 1570 J. FOXE *Actes & Monumentes* (rev. ed.) II. 1474/2 O most idiote huddypeakes and blockishe condemners.
- 1620 T. GRANGER *Syntagma Logicum* 381 Many obdurate Popish Idiotes say, that all things are so deare..because there is so much preaching.
- 1668 T. SHADWELL *Sullen Lovers* III. 32 I am an Ass, an Ideot, a Blockhead and a Rascal, if I don't understand Drammatique Poetry of all things in the World; why this is the onely thing I am esteem'd for in England.
- 1713 J. ADDISON *Trial of Ct. Tariff* He called them ideots and blockheads.
- a1734 R. NORTH *Examen* (1740) II. v. 324 The Faction..had found a sarcasmous Name to fling upon the Loyallists,..that of *Tory*, the same as savage Brute and Idiot.
- 1761 G. COLMAN *Jealous Wife* II. ii. 29 Sure You imagine Me an Ideot, a Driveller.
- 1768 *Woman of Honor* I. 151 They dare not break herd, afraid of the ridicule of idiots for not resembling them.
- 1796 BP. R. WATSON *Apol. for Bible* 283 He would have been an ideot, had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove [etc.].
- 1841 DICKENS *Barnaby Rudge* li. 231 You idiot, do you know what peril you stand in?
- 1892 *Cassell's Family Mag.* Dec. 11/1 Hold your tongues, you blathering idiots.
- 1922 'R. CROMPTON' *Just—William* i. 26 What the deu—why the dickens is the young idiot coming at this time of day?
- 1956 T. WILLIAMS *Let.* 10 Jan. in *Five O'Clock Angel* (1991) 131 And when I remonstrated mildly over a bit of business in rehearsal, she turned on me with a fury and shouted, 'Shut up, idiot!'
- 2002 J. THOMPSON *Wide Blue Yonder* II. 121 Now she'd ruined everything by being an idiot.

†3. A man of low intelligence maintained as a source of amusement to others; a household or court fool; a professional fool or jester. *Obs.*

- 1526 *Will of Thomas Goldisburgh* (P.R.O.: PROB. 11/22) f. 40 To Richard Carlton my Idyot.
- 1586 G. WHITNEY *Choice of Emblemes* I. 81 The ideot likes, with bables for to plaie.
- 1625 W. LISLE tr. G. de S. Du Bartas *Noe* in tr. *Part of Du Bartas* 41 Fooles, idiots, jesters, anticks, wranglers, and suche copes-mates as of naught-worth are suddenly start vp.
- 1711 J. ADDISON *Spectator* No. 47. ¶2 Ideots are still in Request in most of the Courts of Germany, where there is not a Prince of any great Magnificence who has not two or three dress'd, distinguish'd, undisputed Fools in his Retinue.
- 1751 EARL OF ORRERY *Remarks Swift* (1752) xxi. 262 In former ages the courts of France and England were not thought compleatly embellished without a favourite idiot.
- 1773 J. PEHELL *Hist. Univ. Oxf. to Demise Queen Elizabeth* 146 Gascoin mentions, at this time, a certain idiot, or jester, the son of a great man, who was, at twelve years old, archdeacon of Oxford.

B. adj. (attrib.)

1. That is an idiot; profoundly mentally and intellectually disabled; exceedingly stupid.

- c1400 (†c1378) LANGLAND *Piers Plowman* (Laud 581) (1869) B. XI. l. 308 (MED) *Ignorancia non excusat episcopos nec idiotes prestes.*
- 1562 W. BULLEIN *Bk. Use Sicke Men* f. lxix^v, in *Bulwarke of Defence* Chaunged into ideotte fooles.
- 1606 *Wily Beguilde* 31 Your father is too cruell, To..seeke to wed you to an Idiot foole That knowes not how to vse himselfe.
- 1647 H. MORE *Philos. Poems* I. II. lv A private idiot man.
- 1762 O. GOLDSMITH *Citizen of World* II. lxxxix. 116 Yet ideot man laughs, sings, and rejoices in the very face of the sun, and seems no way touched with his situation.

- 1798 WORDSWORTH in Wordsworth & S. T. Coleridge *Lyrical Ballads* 149 (title) The idiot boy.
- 1809 BYRON *Eng. Bards & Sc. Reviewers* 248 The tale of Betty Foy, The idiot mother of 'an idiot boy'.
- 1889 W. MORRIS in J. W. Mackail *Life W. Morris* (1899) II. 221 There were some beautiful willows, and now the idiot Parson has polled them into wretched stumps.
- 1926 H. CRANE *Let.* 19 Aug. (1965) 273 I have made up a kind of friendship with that idiot boy... He is rendingly beautiful at times.
- 1981 S. RUSHDIE *Midnight's Children* 338 The idiot child, they put him in the Army to make a man of him!
- 2002 *N.Y. Times* 10 Nov. II. 36/3 They came to view me like someone's idiot grandmother up in the attic.

2. Of, relating to, or characteristic of an idiot or idiocy, idiotic.

- 1600 T. DEKKER *Old Fortunatus* sig. I^v Call this madnes in, see from the windowes Of euery eye Derision thrusts out cheekes, Wrinkled with Idiot laughter.
- 1616 SHAKESPEARE *King John* (1623) III. iii. 46 Making that idiot laughter keepe mens eyes, And straine their cheekes to idle merriment.
- 1646 *Conscience Caution'd* 10 I would not for Millions, nor for Idiot fantastical honours,..beslave and vassalize my Posterity to immence Tyranny, and unbounded folly.
- 1700 DRYDEN tr. Boccaccio *Cymon & Iphigenia* in *Fables* 545 Long mute he stood, and..His Wonder witness'd with an Ideot laugh.
- 1709 LD. SHAFTESBURY *Sensus Communis: Ess. Freedom of Wit* 105 Why does an Idiot-Look and Manner destroy the Effect of all those outward Charms?
- 1763 C. CHURCHILL *Epist. to W. Hogarth* 30 To drivel out whole years of Ideot breath.
- 1827 T. HOOD *Plea Midsummer Fairies* xciv, in *Plea Midsummer Fairies & Other Poems* 48 To hope my solemn countenance to wring To idiot smiles!
- 1871 R. ELLIS tr. Catullus *Poems* xxxvii. 6 Or if in idiot impotence arow you sit.
- 1885 R. L. STEVENSON & F. STEVENSON *Dynamiter* xiii. 196 When I look upon your idiot face..the tears spring up.
- 1922 W. J. LOCKE *Tale of Triona* xiii. 142 She..was driven by she knew not what idiot romanticalism into the grey worries of wifehood and motherhood.
- 1957 J. FRAME *Owls do Cry* xxxviii. 171 Gaping idiot mouth waterfalled with slobber.
- 2006 C. FRAZIER *Thirteen Moons* II. ii. 39 On idiot impulse, with no prior thought whatsoever, I did as I had seen an older boy do.

COMPOUNDS

C1. Similitive, objective, and parasynthetic, as **idiot-dull**, **idiot-faced**, **idiot-worshipper**, etc.

- 1609 SHAKESPEARE *Troilus & Cressida* v. i. 7 Thou picture of what thou seemest, and Idoll, Of idiot worshippers.
- 1845 C. E. S. NORTON *Child of Islands* 152 Blind! and adder-deaf, —and idiot-dull.
- 1989 N. CAVE *And Ass saw Angel* III. 171 Ah've sat on mah dumb ass and listened through eighteen million ticks and eighteen million tocks of the idiot-faced clock.

C2.

idiot asylum *n.* now *offensive* (*arch.* or *hist.*) a hospital for the mentally ill or mentally and intellectually disabled.

- 1848 *Times* 31 Mar. 5/6 The circle of charitable institutions in this country was completed by the establishment of the Idiot Asylum.
- 1866 J. MACGREGOR *Thousand Miles in Rob Roy Canoe* (ed. 2) vi. 104 Close to the inn was the idiot asylum, an old castle with poor demented women in it.
- 1880 'M. TWAIN' *Tramp Abroad* xxv. 257 They meant an asylum—an idiot asylum.
- 1991 *Post-Standard* (Syracuse, N.Y.) (Nexis) 16 Aug. The lot's bounded by a stone wall that dates to the 19th century 'idiot asylum' up there on the hill.

idiot board *n. colloq.* a prompting board, especially one held in front of a television speaker but not projected on the film.

- 1952 *Newsweek* 4 Aug. 51/2 The Republicans and the Democrats got their 'idiot boards' free.
- 1971 *Radio Times* 4 Nov. 6/4 I can never work with an auto-cue or idiot board. I learn my lines before the show.
- 1993 S. NOREIKO in C. Sanders *French Today* ix. 178 Idiot-boards and autocues 'prompt', but this anglicism is meaningless in French.
- 2007 *Express* (Nexis) 6 Feb. 10 He sang some of his classics... The slightly embarrassing thing was that he had to have the words printed out on an idiot board in front of him in large size type.

idiot box *n. colloq.* (a) an encased mechanism that provides helpful information or performs simple operations; (b) a television set.

- 1955 *European Stars & Stripes* (Darmstadt, Germany) 1 Dec. 10/1 A good friend of..pilots at the Hanau airstrip is a blue and yellow monster known affectionately as the 'idiot box'.
- 1957 *Daily Rec.* (Stroudsburg, Pa.) 8 Jan. 4/8 Author David Chandler refers to his tv set as 'The Idiot Box'.
- 1965 *Lancet* 2 Jan. 46/2 Often they may be found, in semi-hypnotic state, watching the 'idiot box' with its endless stream of images and fullness of sound, all signifying nothing.
- 1973 *Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci.* 211 282 We assume that the modern general purpose computer is an idiot-box capable of performing only the simplest of routines.
- 2004 S. COONTS *Liars & Thieves* (2005) xiii. 142 When the broadcast was over I flipped off the idiot box.

idiot card *n. colloq.* = *idiot board n.*

- 1957 *Sat. Evening Post* 7 Sept. 64 William Maitland goggled a moment like a TV performer caught without his idiot cards.
- 1969 *New Yorker* 27 Sept. 86/3 We had all the written questions put on idiot cards, and then the people read them before the camera.
- 2000 *Times* (Nexis) 16 Feb. (Features section) Signor Prodi seemed to have such intellectual confidence in his case that he was happy to wing it without aides, idiot cards or autocue.

idiot fringe *n.* (a) a woman's or girl's hair worn in a fringe (*arch. slang*); (b) = *lunatic fringe n.* at LUNATIC *adj.* and *n.* Compounds 2; also *attrib.*

- 1879 M. DARTT *On Plains* 8 The tall woman in the linen duster, and the short one in the white finger-puffs, and the young one in the idiot fringe [etc.].
- 1923 J. MANCHON *Le Slang* 130 *Fringe*, le devant des cheveux dans la coiffure à la chien (habitude chez les femmes de la basse classe). On dit aussi idiot-fringe.
- 1929 *Times* 21 Sept. 6/2 We have..an idiot fringe of rich fools who come to Europe and squander their money in all sorts of ways.
- 1965 *Spectator* 5 Mar. 286/1 An article on a small and dying idiot-fringe sect of nationalists in North Germany.
- 2006 *Calgary* (Alberta) *Herald* (Nexis) 21 Oct. A29 The danger..can..be minimized by having better lane markings and more severe penalties imposed upon speeders and the idiot fringe who appear to have no road sense.

idiot light *n. colloq.* a warning light, usually red, that goes on when a fault occurs in a mechanical or electrical device.

- 1968 'E. MCGIRR' *Lead-lined Coffin* iii. 173 He watched the idiot lights in the dashboard..for the warning red which would betoken he had lost the oil.
- 1984 M. A. JARMAN *Dancing Nightly in Tavern* 23 The engine overheating on the Church Road, the idiot light blinking red as they travel south through the pale fields of rock..his silent father, worried, pulling the shining car under the Timber Trail Ranch sign to have the oil checked.
- 2005 *Hot Bike* Mar. 148/1 I checked the location of the idiot lights, inspected the gauges and speedometer.

idiot-proof *adj. colloq.* = FOOL-PROOF *adj.*, especially of equipment.

- 1924 C. VAN DOREN *Many Minds* III. 212 This creed of vitality can not be held to equip the critic with any idiot-proof formula for estimating works of art.
- 1977 *Economist* 8 Oct. 90/2 Viewdata's image could be bungled if the equipment proves not to be idiot-proof.
- 2007 *Daily Tel.* 6 Apr. 26/4 With the aid of a *Reader's Digest* idiot-proof guide to domestic repairs and an expensively purchased slate

ripper, he set about the task with gusto.

† **idiot's hood** *n.* *Obs.* a fool's cap.

1600 T. DEKKER *Old Fortunatus* sig. C4 Why hast thou borrowed then that Idiots hood?

1639 J. WOODALL *Viaticum* Pref. sig. ¶2^v, in *Surgeons Mate* (rev. ed.) He that's wise in his owne conceit, puts on the Idiots hood.

idiot sheet *n. colloq.* = *idiot board n.*; also: a sheet of paper with a similar function.

1952 *Changing Times* Mar. 34 That blizzard head in the new strip show was looking so hard at the idiot sheet that she bumped into the gobo and made a big womp.

1962 R. BRETZ *Techniques Television Production* 487 When cue cards first came into use for full script purposes, they were known derisively as 'idiot sheets'.

1996 *Weekend Austral.* (Brisbane) (Nexis) 10 Aug. 48 Many of television's most celebrated names are utter dimwits, entirely dependent on the autocue, the prompting voice in the earpiece, the idiot sheets waving beneath the lens.

2001 J. VIGOR *Seaworthy Offshore Sailboat* II. ix. 107 That's where an idiot sheet can be of such great help. Simply note all the steps you take in working out a sight and write them down on one page with spaces for all your observations and reckonings.

idiot stick *n. U.S. slang* a shovel.

1930 G. WILLIAMS *Logger-talk* 25 *Idiot stick*, a shovel.

1992 *Calgary (Alberta) Herald* (Nexis) 1 Feb. c1 Coaching beats hell out of the graveyard shift on an idiot stick on Interstate 29. 'When you shovel gravel on road construction [etc.]'.

idiot stitch *n.* tricot stitch, the easiest stitch in crochet work.

1882 S. F. A. CAULFEILD & B. C. SAWARD *Dict. Needlework* 263/2 *Idiot Stitch*. One of the names given to Tricot Stitch.

1982 P. EARNSHAW *Dict. Lace* 31 An enormous number of [chain] stitch variations is possible,..and their names include Idiot Stitch, Hollow Spot, Josephine Tricot, Double Knot and Raised Loop.

2004 *Piecework* Jan.–Feb. 60/2 A Long List of Aliases—Tunisian knitting, *hakning* (Swedish for 'hooking'), Afghan stitch, idiot stitch, railway stitch, fool stitch, [etc.].

DERIVATIVES

'**idiot-like** *adj.* and *adv.*

a1603 T. CARTWRIGHT *Confut. Rhemists New Test.* (1618) 662 A childish and idiotlike pole.

1612 S. ROWLANDS *Knaue of Harts* B b My Stockings Ideot-like, red, greene, and yealow.

1752 G. A. STEVENS *Distress upon Distress* II. 87 He cries to change, and sighs for other Toys, Ideot-like dotes, or Savage-like destroys.

1818 *Cobbett's Weekly Polit. Reg.* 33 288 They, ideot-like, stand staring and sucking their fingers.

1864 TENNYSON *Enoch Arden* (1865) 56 Muttering and mumbling, idiot-like it seemed.

1892 A. BIERCE *Tales of Soldiers & Civilians* 189 Its horrible head..was directed straight toward him, the definition of the wide, brutal jaw and the idiot-like forehead serving to show the direction of its malevolent gaze.

1897 O. WILDE *Let.* 28 May in *De Profundis* (2005) 137 Sometimes he would grin idiot-like to himself and make faces.

1960 A. E. NOURSE *Star Surgeon* ix. 108 A fading away of intelligent responses, leaving thousands of creatures walking blank-faced and idiot-like about the streets and countryside.

1991 N. M. LIPPIT & K. I. SELDEN tr. K. Taeko *Japanese Women Writers* 120 A child who can automatically do what she is told—an idiot-like child—even her face must look like an idiot's.

1993 *Sat. Evening Post* (Nexis) 1 July Naomi managed a weak smile, an idiot-like grin the kids had never seen before.

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