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incompetent, *adj.* and *n.*

Pronunciation: /ɪnˈkɒmpɪtənt/

Frequency (in current use):

Etymology: < French *incompétent*, < late Latin *incompetent-em*, < *in-* (IN- *prefix*³) + *competent-em* COMPETENT *n.*

A. *adj.* Not competent.

†1. Insufficient, inadequate. *Obs.*

- 1611 R. COTGRAVE *Dict. French & Eng. Tongues* at *Rose Chapeau, ou chapel de roses*, a small, sleight, incompetent, or lesse-then-due portion giuen a maid to her mariage.
- 1693 R. BENTLEY *Boyle Lect.* VII. 40 An incompetent Cause for the Formation of a World.
- 1789 A. HAMILTON *Euology on N. Greene* 4 July in *Papers* (1962) II. 347 The situations..were yet incompetent to the full display of those..endowments, with which nature..decorates a favorite.
- 1823 C. LAMB *Tombs in Abbey* in *Elia* 2nd Ser. A purse incompetent to this demand.

2.

a. Of inadequate ability or fitness; not having the requisite capacity or qualification; incapable. Const. *to*, *to do* something. Rarely of things.

- 1641 *Naunton's Fragmenta Regalia* sig. D2^v Sir Francis Knowles was somewhat neare in the Queenes affinitie, and had likewise noe incompetent issue.
- 1693 N. MATHER in J. Owen 2 *Disc. Holy Spirit* Pref. sig. A3 [It] is not for so incompetent a Pen to say as writes this.
- 1702 *Clarendon's Hist. Rebellion* I. I. 4 I may not be thought altogether an incompetent person, having been present as a Member of Parliament in those Councils before.
- 1800 S. T. COLERIDGE *Let.* 13 Oct. (1956) I. 637 I would gladly write any Verses, but to a Prologue or Epilogue I am absolutely incompetent.
- 1817 J. MILL *Hist. Brit. India* II. v. viii. 678 The Nabob, who was totally incompetent to his own defence.
- 1842 TENNYSON *Two Voices* in *Poems* (new ed.) II. 141 Much more, if first I floated free, As naked essence, must I be Incompetent of memory.
- 1869 J. TYNDALL *Notes on Light* 41 A body placed in a light which it is incompetent to transmit appears black.
- 1880 L. STEPHEN *Alexander Pope* v. 131 He was no philosopher, and therefore an incompetent assailant of the abuses of philosophy.

b. Med. Unable to function correctly: used esp. of a valve or sphincter.
(Cf. INCOMPETENCE *n.* 2b.)

- 1863 W. BRAITHWAITE in *Retrospect Med.* XLVII. 69 If..the aortic valvular segments are rendered incompetent, we have the aortic regurgitant current.
- 1879 *St. George's Hosp. Rep.* 9 84 The mitral valves were puckered and incompetent.
- 1939 J. H. DIBLE & T. B. DAVIE *Pathol.* xxxii. 537 The aortic valves are incompetent and allow a certain quantity of blood to flow back into the left ventricle during diastole.
- 1950 *Amer. Jرنل. Obstetr. & Gynecol.* 59 69 An abortion due to an incompetent internal os.
- 1971 *Amer. Jرنل. Digestive Dis.* 16 307 Eight patients had free gastroesophageal reflux through a weak, incompetent sphincter.
- 1971 *Amer. Jرنل. Dis. Children* 121 481/2 The immunologic system may be incompetent or contribute to the etiology of the disease.

3. Not legally competent or qualified.

- 1595 S. DANIEL *First Four Bks. Civile Warres* III. xxii. sig. N4^v Subjects..Judges incompetent To judge their king.
- 1650 T. HOBBS in W. DAVENANT *Disc. upon Gondibert* 120 I lie open to two Exceptions, one of an incompetent, the other of a corrupted Witness.
- 1736 BP. J. BUTLER *Analogy of Relig.* II. iii. 176 The Objections of an incompetent Judgment.
- 1880 J. MUIRHEAD tr. Gaius *Institutes* IV. 320 Further action..is *ipso iure* incompetent.

4. Logically inadmissible or illegitimate.

- 1833 W. HAMILTON in *Edinb. Rev.* Apr. 207 Dr. Whately's definition is, therefore, not only incompetent, but delusive.
- a1856 W. HAMILTON *Lect. Metaphysics* (1860) III. xvii. 320 This process is wholly incompetent to the logician.

5. Geol. Of rock or a stratum: apt to flow or to be crushed when laterally compressed; incapable of forming a simple fold and supporting any overlying strata without being distorted by plastic flow. Also applied to structures and processes dominated by such strata.

- 1891–92 B. WILLIS in *13th Ann. Rep. U.S. Geol. Surv.* (1893) II. 250 If the thrust be not powerful enough to raise the load there will be no uplift; or if the layers be so plastic that they yield to the thrust by swelling, then the principal result of deformation is change of form other than by simple flexure, and it assumes some phase of flowing. This is incompetent structure.
- 1923 *Jرنل. Geol.* 31 506 Several attempts were made to reproduce the overfolds..of the Alps by applying rotational stresses to models in which competent layers were placed between

incompetent layers.

- 1949 C. M. NEVIN *Princ. Struct. Geol.* (ed. 4) iii. 54 Folding has been divided into two groups: competent folding, where the dominantly horizontal pressures are transmitted by the competent beds acting as a strut; and incompetent folding where the forces are mostly vertical and the incompetent beds react passively.
- 1949 C. M. NEVIN *Princ. Struct. Geol.* (ed. 4) iii. 55 Immediately beneath the arch formed by a folded relatively competent bed a formation as incompetent as shale may rise as a broad simple arch, even at a considerable depth.
- 1967 A. I. LEVORSEN *Geol. Petroleum* (ed. 2) viii. 358 In these cases the salt mass acts as an incompetent formation, rising as a result of the deformation of the enclosing rocks.
- 1967 A. I. LEVORSEN *Geol. Petroleum* (ed. 2) viii. 378 Folds in the relatively incompetent salt.

B. n.

An incompetent person.

- 1866 W. R. ALGER *Solitudes Nature & Man* IV. 248 These jealous incompetents had..hurled him down into a muddy pit of error.
- 1882 R. L. STEVENSON *New Arabian Nights* II. 228 A dauber, an incompetent, not fit to be a sign-painter.

DERIVATIVES

in'competentness *n.* incompetence (Bailey vol. II, 1727).

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