

accident, *n.*

(ˈæksɪdənt)

[a. Fr. *accident*:—L. *accidens*, -ent-, *n.* properly *pr. pple.* of *accid-ĕre* to fall, to happen.]

As in many other adopted words, the historical order in which the senses appear in Eng. does not correspond to their logical development, a fact still more noticeable in the derivatives.

I. Anything that happens.

1. †a. An occurrence, incident, event. *Obs.* **b.** Anything that happens without foresight or expectation; an unusual event, which proceeds from some unknown cause, or is an unusual effect of a known cause; a casualty, a contingency. **the chapter of accidents**: the unforeseen course of events. **c. esp.** An unfortunate event, a disaster, a mishap.

c 1374 CHAUCER *Troilus* III. 918 This accident so petous was to here. **1483** CAXTON *Cato* kvi, By some accidentes and wantynges of nature thauncyent retournen and becomen as chyl dren. **1571** QUEEN ELIZABETH in Ellis *Orig. Lett.* II. 189. III. 1 You maie well gesse, by the accidentes of the time, whie I have not made anie answer. **1604** SHAKES. *Oth.* I. iii. 135 I spoke..Of mouing Accidents by Flood and Field. **1650** FULLER *Pisgah Sight* II. 63 The most memorable Accident in this place, was the Idolatry of the Israelites to Baal-peor. **1688** DRYDEN *Brit. Rediv.* 183 No future ills nor accidents appear, To sully and pollute the sacred infant's year. **1702** Eng. *Theophrastus* 230 The wisest councils may be discomposed by the smallest accidents. **1793** SMEATON *Edystone Lightho.* §117 In the progress of the work we should lie so widely open to accidents. **1824-8** LANDOR *Imag. Conv.* (1846) 453 Him I would call the powerful one, who..turns to good account the worst accidents of his fortune. **1871** H. LEE *Miss Barrington* I. xxi. 299 Leaving time to fight for them and putting their trust in the chapter of accidents. **1879** CARPENTER *Ment. Phys.* II. xii. 504 He was led to the discovery..by a series of happy accidents. **1882** *Daily News* 10 July 3/6 Serious railway accident: thirty persons injured. *Mod.* 'Insure your life against accidents.'

d. colloq. An accidental or untimely call of nature.

1899 *Allbutt's Syst. Med.* VIII. 244 The wearing of india-rubber urinals, and other means of avoiding 'accidents'. **1926** *Nation* 9 Jan. 517/2 Then a new child had, as Mabel calls it, 'an accident'. She may have been afraid of asking to go out. **1959** A. WESKER *Roots* II. i. 38 Jimmy Beales give him a real dowsin' down..'cause he had an accident.

e. A child conceived or born as a result of an unintended pregnancy; (an

event which leads to) an unplanned pregnancy. Cf. **MISTAKE** *n.* 1 *d. colloq.*

1932 D. L. SAYERS *Have his Carcase* xxv. 322 Jenny Moggeridge's Baby Charles what was a accident what Mrs Moggeridge was looking after. **1967** M. DRABBLE *Jerusalem the Golden* v. 110, I had two, and then Gabriel was an accident. **1978** F. WELDON *Praxis* xx. 173 'You could always have an accident,' observed Praxis, 'and simply find yourself pregnant.' **1986** *Sunday Tel.* 16 Mar. 10/6 A survey in Australia showed that working women had fewer accidents..on the Pill.

2. abstractly, Chance, fortune. (By accident = Fr. *par accident* (14th c.), L. *per accidens*.)

1490 CAXTON *Eneydos* xxviii. 110 Hir deth naturalle oughte not to hauen comen yet of longe tyme, but by accydente and harde fortune. **1611** SHAKES. *Cymb.* v. v. 278 Consider Sir, the chance of Warre, the day Was yours by accident. **1756** C. LUCAS *On Waters* III. 141 The good or ill they do depend alike upon accident. **1788** JOHNSON *Lett.* I. cxiv. 239 Nature probably has some part in human characters and accident has some part. **1876** FREEMAN *Norm. Cong.* I. App. 628 William, whether by accident or by design, was not admitted.

†**3. Med.** An occurring symptom; *esp.* an unfavourable symptom. *Obs.*

1563 T. GALE *Antidotarie* II. 23 Thys Vnguent..dothe..remoue diuers accidentes and sicknesses. **1622** BACON *Henry VII*, 9 There began..a disease then new: which of the Accidents and manner thereof they called the Sweating-sickness. **1671** MILTON *Samson* 612 Oh, that torment..must secret passage find To the inmost mind, There exercise all his fierce accidents.

†**4.** A casual appearance or effect, a phenomenon. *Obs.*

c 1386 CHAUCER *Clerk's T.* 551 Non accident for noon adversité Was seyn in hir. **1635** N. CARPENTER *Geogr. Del.* I. x. 220 The Inhabitants of a Right Spheare in respect of the heauens haue the same accidents. **1695** WOODWARD *Nat. Hist. Earth* I. (1723) 24 These Fossil Shells are attended with the ordinary accidents of the marine ones, ex. gr. they sometimes grow to one another. **1765** HARRIS *Three Treat.* II. II. 66 Music may imitate the Glidings, Murmurings, Tossings, Roarings, and other Accidents of water.

5. An irregular feature in a landscape; an undulation.

c 1870 LOWELL *Poet. Wks.* (1879) 391 Accidents of open green, Sprinkled with loose slabs square and gray. **1878** in *19th Cent.* 42 Taking advantage of every accident of the ground to conceal himself.

II. That which is present by chance, and therefore non-essential.

6. a. Logic. A property or quality not essential to our conception of a

substance; an attribute. Applied especially in Scholastic Theology to the material qualities remaining in the sacramental bread and wine after transubstantiation; the essence being alleged to be changed, though the accidents remained the same.

c 1380 WYCLIF *Eng. Wks.* (1880) 466 No man durste seye til nou þat accident is goddis body, for þis newe word may haue no ground. **1413** LYDGATE *Pylg. Sowle* (1483) iv. xxvi. 71 Quantite is an accident only appropred to bodyly thynges. **1483** CAXTON *Gold. Leg.* 439/3 Whan the breed is conuerted into the precious body of our lord the accidentes abyden..whytnesse, roundenesse and sauoure. **1561** T. N[ORTON] *Calvin's Inst.* (1634) i. xiii. 56 Hee sticketh not to faigne new accidents in God. **1656** tr. *Hobbes's Elem. Philos.* (1839) 104 Wherefore, I define an accident to be the manner of our conception of body. **1664** H. MORE *Myst. Iniq.* xiii. 45 But I demand, Whether is it less Idolatry to adore the Accidents of the Bread..or the Bread it self? **1765** TUCKER *Lt. of Nat.* I. 17 Disposition, configuration, and motion, are..accidents in ancient dialect, or modifications according to modern philosophers. **1846** MILL *Logic* i. vii. §8. 181 Inseparable accidents are properties which are universal to the species but not necessary to it..Separable Accidents are those which are found in point of fact to be sometimes absent from the species. **1872** O. SHIPLEY *Gloss. Eccl. Terms* 179 *Elements*, the English equivalent term for the accidents after consecration.

b. Textual Criticism. = ACCIDENTAL B. n. d.

1942 W. W. GREG *Edit. Probl. Shakes.* p. 1, What may conveniently be called the 'accidents' of presentation, namely the spelling, punctuation, and other scribal or typographical details. *Ibid.* p. liii, The only other accident we need consider is line division.

7. Hence, by extension, Any accidental or non-essential accompaniment, quality, or property; an accessory, a non-essential.

1621 BURTON *Anat. Mel.* (1651) i. i. iii. ii. 31 Old age, from which natural melancholy is almost an inseparable accident. **1725** DE FOE *Voy. round World* (1840) 6 We had also a third design in our voyage, though it may be esteemed an accident to the rest. **1837** DISRAELI *Venetia* (1871) i. i. 2 With all the brilliant accidents of birth, and beauty, and fortune. **1843** KINGSLEY *Lett.* (1878) I. 104 Eternity is really his home, and Time but an accident to him.

8. Heraldry. An additional point or mark that may be retained or omitted in a coat of arms.

1610 J. GUILLIM *Heraldry* (1660) i. iii. 15 I call those notes or marks, Accidents of Armes, that..may be annexed unto them, or taken from them, their substance still remaining.

†**9. Grammar. pl.** (L. *accidentia*, Quintil.) The changes to which words are subject, in accordance with the relations in which they are used; the

expression of the phenomena of gender, number, case, mood, tense, etc.
Obs. replaced by [ACCIDENCE](#).

1589 PUTTENHAM *Eng. Poesie* (1869) 182 Not changing one word for another, by their accidents or cases. **1612** BRINSLEY *Posing of the Parts* (1669) 1 The Accidents; that is, the things belonging to the parts of speech.

10. a. *attrib.* and *Comb.*

1866 *Boston Directory* 565/2 The Pioneer Accident Insurance Company in America. **1892** A. W. PINERO *Magistrate* III, p. 135 Tell Sergeant Lugg to look over the Accident-Book, this morning's Hospital Returns. **1899** *Westm. Gaz.* 2 Mar. 8/3 Last year we paid about 5,000 accident claims. **1899** *Daily Chron.* 10 Aug. 5/7 They were manning the accident boat. **1905** *Ibid.* 19 Sept. 4/4 Life-saving and accident-preventing machinery. **1906** *Ibid.* 15 June 5/5 The accident rate was considered..low. **1918** W. HUTCHINSON *Doctor in War* (1919) xxii. 231 There seemed to be no even approximately 'accident-proof' type of airman. **1964** *Economist* 4 Jan. 34/2 Motorists..with their accident-potentiality enhanced by alcohol.

b. accident neurosis, a neurosis caused or precipitated by an accident; **accident-prone** *a.*, predisposed or likely to cause or attract an accident; also *absol.*; so **accident-proneness**, such predisposition or likelihood.

1901 in DORLAND *Med. Dict.* 442/2 Accident neurosis. **1932** J. H. HUDDLESON *Accidents, Neuroses & Compensation* iv. 59 Accident neuroses make up the most discussed group. **1961** *Listener* 28 Sept. 459/1 The term 'accident neurosis' refers to a disabling complaint of nervous origin: the symptoms are subjective, and there is usually no bodily sign of any emotional disturbance.

1926 FARMER & CHAMBERS *Psychol. Study Accident Rates* 3 'Accident proneness' implies the possession of those qualities which have been found to lead to an undue number of accidents. *Ibid.*, A person can be said to be accident prone without any knowledge of the number of accidents he has sustained. **1951** *Sci. Amer.* Aug. 68/3 A pushed conveyance such as a wheelbarrow..is..less accident-prone than the pulled four-wheel truck. **1952** *Lancet* 28 June 1296/1 Flanders Dunbar made a study of the accident-prone which bears out reasonable expectations. **1954** A. KOESTLER *Invis. Writing* xv. 167 Their accident-proneness was entirely due to the hazard of a Jewish origin.

Draft partial entry June 2001

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[**1898** J. HUDSON *How to become Trained Nurse* 200 Cases treated..4,368 accident and emergency.] **1931** *Science* 4 Sept. 238/2 On the ground floor will be the examining and treatment rooms for surgery, including orthopedics, urology, physical therapy and *accident and emergency units. **1967** *Nursing Times* 16 June 796 (title) Accident and emergency departments; sisters' views. **1995** *Guardian* 4 Apr. (Educ. section) 8/3 Davis stopped breathing for a minute. He was ambulated to accident and emergency.

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► *colloq.* **an accident waiting to happen** *n.* a situation which is potentially hazardous, *esp.* one resulting from neglect or carelessness; someone or something considered liable to cause such a situation.

1935 E. G. BORING et al. *Psychol.* 414 Several investigators have studied the effect of the direct injection of adrenin into normal and abnormal adults... One subject termed the experience 'a feeling like an accident waiting for some place to happen'. [**1947** J. BATAL et al. *Your Newspaper* 56 Too many reporters play around on the surface of things, covering each event as they would an accident—waiting for it to happen and then belatedly rushing into purple description.] **1976** *Facts on File* (Nexis) 14 Feb. 115/1 He recommended closing down [the nuclear power plant].. 'at once—it's almost an accident waiting to happen'. **1985** *Globe & Mail (Toronto)* 10 Oct. c7/1 He has been knocked incessantly—over-rated, hopeless in his own end, an accident waiting to happen. **1999** *Independent* 10 Nov. i. 9/1 Possible risks include the escape of insect-resistant genes into natural forest... 'This is a global accident waiting to happen,' said Francis Sullivan, director of programmes at WWF-UK.