

Oxford English Dictionary | The definitive record of the English language

microphone, *n.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /ˈmaɪkrəfəʊn/, U.S. /ˈmaɪkrəˌfoʊn/

Frequency (in current use):

Origin: A borrowing from Greek, combined with an English element. **Etymons:** MICRO- *comb. form*, Greek *φωνή*.

Etymology: < MICRO- *comb. form* + ancient Greek *φωνή* sound (see -PHONE *comb. form*), after MICROSCOPE *n.* (see quot. 1684 at sense 1). In sense 2 partly after TELEPHONE *n.* (see note below).

†1. A mechanical device (such as an ear trumpet) by which faint sounds can be made more audible. *Obs.*

1684 BP. N. MARSH in *Philos. Trans.* (Royal Soc.) 14 482 As Microscopes or Magnifying Glasses, help the Eye to see near Objects, that by reason of their smallness were invisible before...: So Microphones or Micracousticks, that is, Magnifying ear instruments may be contriv'd after that manner, that they shall render the most minute Sound in nature distinctly Audible.

1727 N. BAILEY *Universal Etymol. Eng. Dict.* II *Microphones*, instruments for magnifying small sounds.

1827 C. WHEATSTONE in *Q. Jrnl. Sci.* II. 69 An instrument which, from its rendering audible the weakest sounds, may with propriety be called the Microphone.

1842 W. T. BRANDE *Dict. Sci., Lit. & Art* 739/2 *Microphone*, an instrument for increasing the intensity of low sounds.

1859 *Proc. Royal Soc.* 1857–9 9 202 This distinguished philosopher [*sc.* Wheatstone] constructed the instrument named a Microphone, for the purpose of augmenting weak sounds upon this principle.

1880 'M. TWAIN' *Tramp Abroad* xiii, I bent the flaps of them down and furled them into five or six folds, and pressed them against the hearing-orifice—but it did no good: the faculty was so sharpened by nervous excitement that it was become a microphone and could hear through the overlays without trouble.

2. Originally: a telephone transmitter capable of amplifying faint sounds.

Now: any instrument designed to convert sound waves into corresponding variations in voltage or current, which may then be amplified, reconverted into sound (as in broadcasting and the telephone), or recorded. *Colloq.* abbreviated *mike*.

Hughes's instrument was simply a particularly sensitive telephonic transmitter (hence the name: see quot. 1889). Modifications of it were so widely used that *microphone* became synonymous with *transmitter* and acquired its present more general meaning.

1878 D. E. HUGHES in *Proc. Royal Soc.* 27 365, I have also devised an instrument suitable for magnifying weak sounds, which I call a *microphone*. The microphone, in its present form, consists simply of a lozenge-shaped piece of gas carbon, one inch long [etc.].

1889 W. H. PREECE & J. MAIER *Telephone* iv. 37 Hughes' Microphone... The microphone is nothing but a telephonic transmitter, but it owes its name..to its power to convert vibrations of feeble intensity into undulatory currents, which, passing through a receiving telephone, produce sonorous vibrations of much greater intensity than those of the original source.

- 1891 F. C. ALLSOP *Telephones* ii. 20 Prof. Hughes's microphone..forms the basis on which all the modern carbon transmitters are constructed.
- 1923 W. S. CHURCHILL *World Crisis 1915* 291 Already the microphone or hydrophone for detecting the beat of a submarine propeller in the distance had been discovered.
- 1923 E. W. MARCHANT *Radio Telegr.* vi. 76 Suppose..that the emission of waves from the transmitting aerial is controlled by means of a microphone, such as is employed in the ordinary telephone transmitter, the stream of waves given out by the antenna will be varied in accordance with the fluctuations in the current passing through the microphone.
- 1929 *Morning Post* 24 May 12/7 The engineer..in film-direction..has the last word as to whether the actor is speaking the line effectively for the microphone.
- 1935 H. C. BRYSON *Gramophone Record* iii. 59 Three main kinds of microphone are in common use: the carbon microphone, the condenser microphone, and the moving coil microphone.
- 1962 A. NISBETT *Technique Sound Studio* ii. 42 As an example of the sort of set-up which can be adopted in this type of studio is one where no less than six microphones were used for a quarter-hour playlet.
- 1970 M. L. GAYFORD in T. L. Squires *Telecommunications Pocket Bk.* iv. 36 The standard modern telephone sets now in production in most countries represent a considerable improvement over earlier sets... Improved designs of microphone and receiver give a generally better frequency response and transient response.
- 1987 B. MOORE *Colour of Blood* xxii. 167 Half a dozen men and women hurried toward their car, some with cameras, some with microphones and sound equipment.
- 2000 *Personal Finance* Jan. 16/2 To use the software you'll need a good sound card—preferably SoundBlaster compatible, and a microphone designed for speech recognition.

COMPOUNDS

microphone boom *n.* a boom (BOOM *n.*² 1d) supporting a microphone.

- 1931 L. COWAN *Recording Sound for Motion Pictures* 377 *Microphone boom*, crane-like device for supporting and manipulating microphone.
- 1954 *Time* 12 July 47/3 Joan Diener, instead of being forced to stand near a microphone boom in order to be heard, was able to move at will in a TV studio by means of a tiny concealed microphone transmitter.
- 1985 *New Yorker* 2 Dec. 98/2 Sound man holding up angled microphone booms.
- 1998 *GQ* Aug. 200/2 The harsh set lamps illuminate the scene and the microphone boom hovers above the couple, catching every groan and cry of pleasure.

This entry has been updated (OED Third Edition, December 2001).

Oxford University Press

Copyright © 2017 Oxford University Press . All rights reserved.

Your access is brought to you by:
Admin. Office%2C US Courts