

seal

NOUN²

Etymology

Summary

A borrowing from French.

Etymon: French *seel*.

< **Old French** *seel* (modern **French** *sceau*) = **Provençal** *selh*-s, **Spanish** *sello* (also in learned form *sigilo*), **Portuguese** *sello* (also *sigillo*), **Italian** *suggello* (also *sigillo*) < **Latin** *sigillum* (in **classical Latin** only in plural), small picture, engraved figure, seal, diminutive of *signum*: see **sign** *n*.

Notes

The **Latin** word was at various periods adopted into several **Germanic** languages: **Gothic** *sigljō* neuter, **Middle High German** *sigel* (masculine) (modern **German** *siegel* neuter), **Middle Low German**, **Middle Dutch** *segel* (**Low German** *segel*, **Dutch** *zegel* neuter), **Swedish** *sigill* neuter, **Danish** *segl*, **Icelandic** *sigli* neuter A compound form of the same meaning occurs in **Old English** *insegel* (see **inseil** *n*.) = **Old High German** *insigili*. The **Old English** *sig(e)l* brooch (compare **Old High German** *sigilla* 'lunula'), *sig(e)le* neuter, necklace (= **Old Norse** *sigli*) are, in spite of the difference of sense, probably connected with some early **Germanic** adopted form of **Latin** *sigillum*.

Meaning & use

1.a. A device (e.g. a heraldic or emblematic design, a letter, word, or sentence) impressed on a piece of wax or other plastic material adhering or attached by cords or parchment slips to a document as evidence of authenticity or attestation; also, the piece of wax, etc. bearing this impressed device. 1258-

In modern (legal) practice the seal is often represented by a coloured wafer following the signature of each of the parties.

Leaden seals were used by the Popes, the Eastern Emperors, and certain other high dignitaries.

1258 We senden ȝew þis writ open, sened wiþ vre seel .
Proclam. Henry III (Bodleian MS.) in *Transactions of Philological Society* 1880-1 (1883) App. *174

c1290 Þe opere bischopus al-so On þis chartre heore seles sette.
Beket 627 in *South English Legendary* vol. I. 124

6.b. The quantity of water or tar left in the dip-pipe for preventing the escape of gas.

1877-

1877

An argument raised against telescopic gasholders is the liability of the water forming the lute, or seal , to freeze.

W. Richards, *Manufacture Coal Gas* 210

6.c. A small quantity of water left in a trap to prevent the escape of foul air from a sewer or drain.

1889-

1889

This trap lost one inch of its seal in five trials out of ten.

Waring, *Sewerage* 282

6.d. gen. Any means of preventing the passage of gas or liquid into or out of something, esp. at a place where two surfaces meet.

a1884-

a1884

Seal, an automatic valve closing a pipe.

E. H. Knight, *Practical Dictionary of Mechanics* Suppl. 788/1

1884

The depth of seal is the distance from the surface of the water in the bowl to the top of the intake.

Waring in *Century Magazine* December 263/1

1938

A method of making a vacuum-tight seal between metal and porcelain.

J. Strong, *Modern Physical Lab. Practice* iv. 152

1970

The seal ..is compressed on the forward stroke to prevent leakage past the plunger.

K. Ball, *Fiat 600, 600D Autobook* x. 118/2

1974

Metal-can closures operate by..vacuum seals (which rely on atmospheric pressure on the lid).

Encyclopædia Britannica Macropædia vol. XIII. 857/2

Pronunciation

BRITISH ENGLISH

/si:l/ 

seel

U.S. ENGLISH

/si(ə)l/ 

seeuhl

Pronunciation keys

Forms