

stow

VERB ¹

Etymology

Summary

Formed within English, by conversion.

< **stow** *n.*¹ Compare **bestow** *v.*

Notes

Old English appears to have one example, *stouuigan* (= **stówian*) ‘retentare’ (*Corpus Gloss.* c725); but the meaning of the lemma is obscure, and the verb recorded from the 14th cent. onwards is probably an independent formation.

Meaning & use

1. †

1.a. *transitive*. To place; to put in a certain place, position, or situation. *Obsolete*.

1362–1594

- 1362

Leste þe kyng and his counseil ȝor comunes apeire, And beo stiward in oure stude til ȝe be stouwet [*variant readings* stewed, stuede, stuyd, stywed, stowed] betere.
W. Langland, *Piers Plowman* A. v. 39
- c1374

And for þou..Hast holpin þere I likly was to steruyn And me ben l-stewid [*other MSS.* bistowed] in so hi a plase.



G. Chaucer, *Troilus & Criseyde* iii. 1271 (MS. Gg.)

(a1387) Tullius..seip þat Socrates..cleped filosofie from hevene into erþe, and **stowed** [Latin *collocavit*] filosofie in citees.

J. Trevisa, translation of R. Higden, *Polychronicon* (St. John's Cambridge MS.) (1871) vol. III. 277

c1400 & when ȝe arn **staued**, styfly stekez yow þerinne.

(?c1380) *Cleanness* l. 352

c1400 Wheþer þay wern worþy, oþer wers, wel wern þay **stowed**.

(?c1380) *Cleanness* l. 113

c1400 Al wer **stawed** & stoken, as þe steuen wolde.

(?c1380) *Cleanness* (1920) l. 360

c1440 **Stowyn**, or cowche to-gedyr, *loco, colloco*.

Promptorium Parvulorum 478/1

1558 And captiue children stode, and tremblyng wives in long aray Were **stowed** about and wept.

T. Phaer, translation of Virgil, *Seuen First Bookes of Eneidos* ii. sig. F.ij

1592 His eie had **stoed** her in his heart.

W. Warner, *Albions England* (revised edition) viii. xli. 178

1594 Till sable Night..in her vaultie prison, **stowes** the daie.

W. Shakespeare, *Lucrece* sig. B3^v

reflexive

1594 Part campt abroad, part them in circuit **stowe**, Another part within Tortosa lay.

R. Carew, translation of T. Tasso, *Godfrey of Bulloigne* i. 13

1.b. To lodge, quarter, find room for (persons). Now only in derogatory sense (after 3).

1607-1821

1607 If thou hast roome to **stooe** him in thy Tunne, He will be ready both to goe and runne.

S. Rowlands, *Diogenes Lanthorne* sig. C1^v

a1616 Oh thou foule theefe, where hast thou **stowed** my daughter?



W. Shakespeare, *Othello* (1622) i. ii. 63

- 1687** There they lodge as well as they can, some having little Rooms made of wood, to which they go up by Ladders, and are **stowed** three or four together in one.
A. Lovell, translation of J. de Thévenot, *Travels into Levant* i. 277
- 1707** You've no Friend left, but trusting Landlady, Who **stows** you on hard Truckle, Garret high.
M. Prior, *Satire upon Poets* 76
- 1739** She **stowed** her children in a pair of panniers, and so proceeded on her journey.
H. Tootel, *Church Hist. Eng.* vol. II. 170/2
- 1759** Mrs. Beatrix Ruthven was brought..as one of their gentlewomen, into the court in the evening, and **stowed** in a chamber prepared for her by the queen's direction.
W. Robertson, *History of Scotland* vol. II. viii. 47
- 1770** The Coaches came, and Harry assisted..in carrying..and gently **stowing** the Maimed and Wounded into half a Dozen of them.
H. Brooke, *Fool of Quality* (Dublin edition) vol. V. xvii. 278
- 1788** We were much distress at Rotheram for want of room, the rain driving us into the house. However we **stowed** in it as many as we possibly could.
J. Wesley, *Journal* 8 July
- 1821** I will but see him **stowed**, and be back with you presently.
W. Scott, *Kenilworth* vol. III. vi. 104

2. † To invest (money); to apply (money or goods) to a particular purpose; to spend. (Cf. **bestow** v. 5, 5b) Obsolete.

c1440–1762

Sometimes written 'stow, as if short for **bestow** v.

- c1440** **Stowyn**, or waryn, or besettyn, as men don moneye or chaffer, *commuto*.
Promptorium Parvulorum 478/1
- c1616** If thou dost flow In thy frank guiftes, & thy golde freely **stow**, The principall will make thy pennance ebbe.
R. C., *Times' Whistle* (1871) vi. 2544
- 1647** Remember ye'ar all venturers; and in this Play How many twelve-pences ye have 'stow'd this day.
Prol. to Fletcher's Mad Lover in F. Beaumont & J. Fletcher, *Comedies & Tragedies* sig. D4/1

- 1745** And yet Lorenzo still affects the World; There, **stowes** his Treasure.
E. Young, *Complaint: Night the Eighth* 2
- 1762** When you **stows** eighteen pence in cakes & beer, To treat that dirty trollup, Mall Rosevear.
Gentleman's Magazine vol. 32 287/1

finance

3.a. To place in a receptacle to be stored or kept in reserve. †Rarely with *up*.

c1485–

- c1485 (1456)** To **stou** vp his suerde jn his furrell.
G. Hay, *Buke of Law of Armys* (2005) 104
- c1595** Death in the pitt his Carrion foode doth **stow**.
Countess of Pembroke, *Psalmes* xlix. 26 in *Collected Works* (1998) vol. II. 46
- 1596** His neather lip was..Like a wide deepe poke..In which he wont the relickes of his feast And cruell spoyle, which he had spard, to **stow**.
E. Spenser, *Second Part of Faerie Queene* iv.vii. sig. F8
- 1601** It was fiercely assaulted, and as valiantly defended, vntill the fire began to take hold vpon the bulwarke wherein their prouision of gunpowder was **stowed**.
R. Johnson, translation of G. Botero, *Trauellers Breuiat* 125
- 1707** He's soon equipp'd for his Journey, for he **stows** all his Baggage in his Pockets.
E. Ward, *Wooden World Dissected* 53
- 1713** Some use to put up Fish in Baskets or Hampers for Carriage, **stowing** them with Grass between.
R. North, *Discourse of Fish & Fish-ponds* xvi. 62
- 1720** [That they] had brought home not only their Purses fill'd with Gold and Silver, but had likewise **stow'd** it in to Pots and Vessells.
J. Ozell et al., translation of R. A. de Vertot, *History of Revolutions Roman Republic* vol. II. ix. 51
- 1862** I..Place 'neath my head the *havre-sac* Which I have **stowed** my little all in.
C. S. Calverley, *Verses & Translations* (ed. 2) 64
- 1874** Raftered lofts to **stow** the hay.
J. A. Symonds, *Sketches Italy & Greece* (1898) vol. I. ii. 33



1877 She'd smug a whole piece of silk and **stow** it under her petticoats.
Five Years' Penal Servitude iii. 246

absolute

1824 The Miller, or old Peel-the-Causeway, will tell you where to **stow**.
W. Scott, Redgauntlet vol. III. ii. 42

3.b. *jocularly*. To find room for (a quantity of food).

1833-

1833 We are still filled with curiosity..to know how they contrive to **stow** all they eat.
L. Ritchie, Wanderings by Loire 54

humorous

4. *Nautical*.

4.a. To place (cargo) in proper order in the hold or other receptacles in a ship; also, to store (provisions, etc.) between decks.

1555-

Possibly influenced by the (etymologically unconnected) Dutch *stouwen* in the same sense.

- 1555** Ptolomye..caused all thys golde and siluer..to bee put into certayne shippes., and ordeyned that holes shoulde be made in the bottoms of the sayde vessels wherin he had **stowed** him selfe and the mony.
H. Braham, Inst. Gentleman sig. Evj

1598 *Stipare*..Also to presse downe hard, to **stowe** as merchandise is in a ship.
J. Florio, Worlde of Wordes

1627 Stowage or to **stow**, is to put the goods in Howle in order.
J. Smith, Sea Grammar vii. 33

1633 There **stowd** we a But of Wine also.
T. James, Strange Voyage 74



- 1644

To *Stowe*, is to put any goods in Howld (in order, for else we say it is not **stowed**, but lyes in howld) also we call it stowing betweene the Decks of [*read if*] any goods or victuals be placed in order upon the Decks: but it is not used in this kind to small things, as to a Chest or the like.
H. Mainwaring, *Sea-mans Dictionary* 103
- 1661

He may not over-charge or over-lade his Ship, nor **stowe** Goods above her birth-mark.
J. Godolphin, *Συνηγορος Θαλασσιος* Introduction sig. [a5^v]
- 1725

The Goddess shov'd the vessel from the shores, And **stow'd** within its womb the naval stores.
W. Broome in A. Pope et al., translation of Homer, *Odyssey* vol. I. ii. 439
- 1743

Here we employ'd most of our Time in getting aboard Water, and **stowing** our dry Provisions between Decks.
J. Bulkeley & J. Cummins, *Voyage to South-seas* 3
- 1748

She takes on board a much greater quantity of water than can be **stowed** between decks,..yet..even a three months store of water could never be **stowed** in a ship so loaded.
B. Robins & R. Walter, *Voyage round World by Anson* ii. x. 241
- 1800

I am but the ship in which his hopes were **stow'd**.
S. T. Coleridge, translation of F. Schiller, *Death of Wallenstein* i. vii. 24
- 1821

Stow the eatables in the aft locker.
P. B. Shelley, *Boat on Serchio* 74
- 1842

Goods **stowed** upon the deck.
H. J. Stephen, *New Commentaries on Laws of England* vol. II. 179
- 1849

The human cargoes were **stowed** close in the holds of small vessels.
T. B. Macaulay, *History of England* vol. I. v. 651
- 1883

Part of the timber which was **stowed** on the deck was jettisoned by the captain of the vessel.
Brett in *Law Times Reports* (1884) vol. XLIX. 768/2

nautical

4.b. To fasten down (persons) under the hatches for confinement or safety.

1602-

- 1602

Antonio's bride, pure heart, defam'd, and **stoad** Vnder the hatches of obscuring earth.
J. Marston, *Antonios Reuenge* ii. iv. sig. E^v



- a1616

The Marriners all vnder hatches **stowed**.
W. Shakespeare, *Tempest* (1623) i. ii. 231
- a1640

Mast. Clap this woman under hatches..For heavens sake **stoaw** this woman.
J. Fletcher & P. Massinger, *Sea Voy.* i. i, in F. Beaumont & J. Fletcher, *Comedies & Tragedies* (1647) sig. Aaaaa/2
- 1644

They..had **stowed** the lady and her people under hatches.
J. Winthrop, *History of New England* (1826) (modernized text) vol. II. 192

nautical

4.c. To put (guns, oars, furniture, etc.) in the proper receptacles on board.

c1595-

- c1595

[He] caused his leiftenant..to commaunde the gunners to make readie all such great peeces of ordinance as weare not allreadie dismounted and **stowed**.
Captain Wyatt in G. F. Warner, *Voyage of Robert Dudley to West Indies* (1899) 58
- 1596

As for the Oares..,they had **stoed** them aboarde their Shippes.
H. Savile, *Answer in Libell Spanish Lies* 24
- 1700

Some **stow** their Oars, or stop the leaky Sides.
J. Dryden, translation of Ovid, *Ceyx & Alcyone* in *Fables* 365
- 1726

I took out my other Cables which were **stowed** in one of the Ships.
J. Swift, *Gulliver* vol. I. i. viii. 136
- 1857

[They] **stowed** the anchors.
C. Gribble in *Mercantile Marine Magazine* (1858) vol. 5 8
- 1867

Stowing *Hammocks*, placing them in a neat and symmetrical order in the hammock-netting.
W. H. Smyth & E. Belcher, *Sailor's Word-book*

nautical

4.d. To furl (a sail).

1644-

- 1644

Also the placing and laying of the top-sailes in the top, is called **Stowing** the top-sailes.



H. Mainwaring, *Sea-mans Dictionary* 103

1769 *Dedans*, when expressed of the sails, imports furled or **stowed**.

W. Falconer, *Universal Dictionary of Marine* Transl. French Terms

1823 We close-reefed the top-sails, and **stowed** the courses.

W. Scoresby, *Journal of Voyage to Northern Whale-fishery* 302

1836 The men..were.. **stowing** away the foretopmast-staysail.

F. Marryat, *Pirate i*, in *Pirate & Three Cutters* 7

1885 8 A.M.— **Stowed** foresail... 10 P.M.— **Stowed** topgallant sail.

A. Brassey, *In Trades* 465

sailing

4.e. to stow down: to put down into a vessel's hold; in quot. **1850**, to yield (a certain quantity) to be stowed down.

1850–

1850 That whale **stowed us down** eighty-five barrels of oil.

H. T. Cheever, *Whale & his Captors* xii. 198

nautical

4.f. Of a ship: To have stowage-room for; to hold. ? *Obsolete*.

1615–

1615 The Busse can conueniently **stow** at once but 34 Last of Cask.

E. Sharpe, *Britaines Busse* sig. C2^v

1625 Shall thy black Bark those guilty spirits **stow** That kill themselves for love?

J. Fletcher, *Mad Lover* iv. i, in F. Beaumont & J. Fletcher, *Comedies & Tragedies* (1647) sig. C4/1

1645 He entertained as many as his ship could **stow**.

J. Winthrop, *History of New England* (1826) (modernized text) vol. II. 240

nautical



5.a. Nautical. To fill (the hold of a ship, etc.) with cargo; to load (a ship). Also, to fit up (a ship), supply with necessities.

1692–

1692 *Stowing the Hold*, is when they take goods into the Hold.

Smith's Sea-mans Grammar (new edition) i. xvi. 78

1703 Upon that occasion I repeated my Presents; in compensation of which my Pirogues were *stow'd* with Beef as full as they could hold.

translation of L. de Lahontan, *New Voyages to North-America* vol. I. 127

1755 If..a Master overloads his Ship or *stows* it unskilful.

N. Magens, *Essay on Insurances* vol. II. 16

1845 This officer is directed..to obtain the most correct information he can of the manner in which the hold was *stowed* when she was last in commission.

Encyclopædia Metropolitana vol. VI. 383/1

1856 I find upon my return the brig so *stowed* and refitted that four days would prepare us for sea.

E. K. Kane, *Arctic Explorations* vol. I. xix. 234

nautical

5.b. transferred. To fill (a receptacle), to pack (full, close) with things or persons; to crowd with contents.

1710–

1710 [A sailor speaks.] Pshaw, who would not stand all this, to have their upper and lower Teer well *Stow'd* with Flip?

C. Shadwell, *Fair Quaker of Deal* i. i. 15

1758 The House was *stowed* as full as possible, but still many were constrained to stand without.

J. Wesley, *Journal* 11 October

1786 Ye Enbrugh Gentry! The tythe o' what ye waste at cartes Wad *stow'd* his [sc. Fergusson's] pantry!

R. Burns, *Poems* 209

1815 The lawyer afterwards compared his mind to the magazine of a pawnbroker, *stowed* with goods of every description, but [etc.].

W. Scott, *Guy Mannering* vol. II. 330

1817 The passage boat..was *stowed* close with all people of all nations.

S. T. Coleridge, *Satyrane's Letters* i, in *Biographia Literaria* vol. II. 207

- 1850** The window [of the shop] was **stowed** full of cakes of cavendish, twists of negrohead, and coils of pigtail.
G. Cupples, *Green Hand* ii. 19/2
- 1850** The morning was spent in **stowing** the waggons, greasing the wheels, [etc.].
R. Gordon-Cumming, *Five Years of Hunter's Life South Africa* vol. I. x. 211

6. to stow away.

6.a. *transitive*. To remove and store until required; to put (a thing) away in a secret or not readily accessible place, or where it will be out of the way; occasionally to put or lodge (a person) in out-of-the-way quarters, or in a place of concealment; *jocularly*, to 'put out of sight', 'dispose of', eat up (quantities of food).

1795–

- 1795** Successive hoeings [of the carrots] will cost about four pounds per acre: and gathering, lopping, tailing, and **stowing away**, will be about four pounds per acre more.
C. Vancouver, *General View of Agriculture Essex* 23
- 1825** He was '**stowed away**' in a manner perfectly suitable, as Betty the chambermaid thought, to the condition of an outside passenger..who..carried his own portmanteau up-stairs.
T. Hook, *Sayings & Doings* 2nd Series vol. III. 41
- 1833** The bales of merchandize which could not be **stowed away** before dark.
H. Martineau, *Messrs. Vanderput & Snoek* i. 1
- 1847** At last the guard returned; once more I was **stowed away** in the coach.
C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre* vol. I. v. 70
- 1857** We had some difficulty about **stowing away** the legs of a tall philosopher.
Lord Dufferin, *Letters from High Latitudes* vii. 133
- 1858** We **stowed away** a good breakfast.
M. Tuckett, *Diary* 24 November (c1975) 21
- 1865** They..eat till it becomes physically impossible for them to **stow away** any more.
D. Livingstone & C. Livingstone, *Narrative of Expedition to Zambesi* vii. 169
- 1881** On the spiritual theory, past ideas..must be imagined to be **stowed away** in some fashion, to exist all the time till they happen to be wanted.
A. Barratt, *Physical Metempiric* (1883) 253

1885 The plate..is now **stowed away** in the strong room of a bank.
Chitty in *Law Times' Reports* vol. 53 83/2

reflexive

1849 Then I shins aloft up a tree, where I stowed myself away till noon.
G. Cupples, *Green Hand* v, in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* October 449/2

humorous

6.b. *intransitive for reflexive.* To conceal oneself on board a ship, train, or aeroplane; to be a **stowaway** *n.*

a1894–

- a1894** He had now made up his mind to **stow away**.
R. L. Stevenson, *Amateur Emigrant* (1895) 122
- 1916** They escaped and reached Gibraltar on a steamer on which they had **stowed away**.
Daily Chronicle 3 February
- 1929** Otto was a Viennese by birth, but had **stowed away** in a Danube barge when he was ten years old, had taken to the sea, and thereafter generally served in English ships.
R. Hughes, *High Wind in Jamaica* vii. 168
- 1973** A Brazilian youth was sent home..after **stowing away** on board a South African Airways aircraft by mistake.
Times 8 August 7/3

7. *slang.*

7.a. † *intransitive.* To cease speaking, 'shut up'. *Obsolete.*

1567–1819

- 1567** **Stow** you, holde your peace.
T. Harman, *Caueat for Commen Cursetors* (new edition) Peddelars Frenche sig. Giii^v
- 1699** **Stow**, you have said enough.
B. E., *New Dictionary Canting Crew*



- 1796

Stow

 you, be silent, or hold your peace.
Grose's Classical Dictionary of Vulgar Tongue (ed. 3)
- 1819

Stow

,

stow

 it, or *stow-faking*, an intimation from a thief to his pall, to desist from what he is about.
J. H. Vaux, *New Vocabulary Flash Language in Memoirs* vol. II. 215

colloquial and slang

7.b. transitive. To desist from.

1676–

- 1676

Stow

 your whids, c[anting], speak warily.
E. Coles, *English Dictionary*
- 1806

A sailor..bawled..for those aloft to

stow

 their jabber.
Naval Chronicle vol. 15 18
- 1819

To

stow

 any business, employment, or mode of life, is the same as to *stash it*, &c.
J. H. Vaux, *New Vocabulary Flash Language in Memoirs* vol. II. (at cited word)
- 1838

Stow

 that gammon,' interposed the robber impatiently.
C. Dickens, *Oliver Twist* vol. I. xv. 240
- 1857

Stow

 your mag, hold your tongue. *L [ow] Life*.
'Ducange Anglicus', *Vulgar Tongue* 20
- 1865

Stow

 larks, Jimmy,' said the constable.
H. Kingsley, *Hillyars & Burtons* xxxiii
- 1867

Stow

 that, sir,' cried Rake, vehemently.
'Ouida', *Under Two Flags* vol. II. xi. 312
- 1884

Pew.

Stow

 your gab (seizing his wrist).
W. E. Henley & R. L. Stevenson, *Admiral Guinea* (1892) iii. ii. 232

colloquial and slang



† Obscure or uncertain senses:

8.a. ? To bring to a stand.

c1440

c1440 Stowyn, or charyn ageyne cowpyn, *idem quod* stoppyn.
Promptorium Parvulorum 478/1

8.b. ? To arrest, imprison. *Obsolete.*

c1450–1614

c1450 Accusator. Stow that harlot sum erthely wyght... *Juvenis*. Ȝiff any man stow me this nyth, I xal hym ȝeve a dedly wownde.
Coventry Mysteries, Wom. Adultery (1841) 217

1546 Ye crye stowe the thefe, to hyde your selfe with the noyse.
Bishop S. Gardiner, *Declar. True Articles* 15

1614 My lord and father hath put them all to the bastinado twice this morning already; not a wayting woman but has been stowed ifaith.
R. Tailor, *Hogge hath lost Pearle* ii. sig. C3^v

law

Pronunciation

BRITISH ENGLISH

/stəʊ/ 
stoh

U.S. ENGLISH

/stou/ 
stoh

Pronunciation keys ▼



Forms

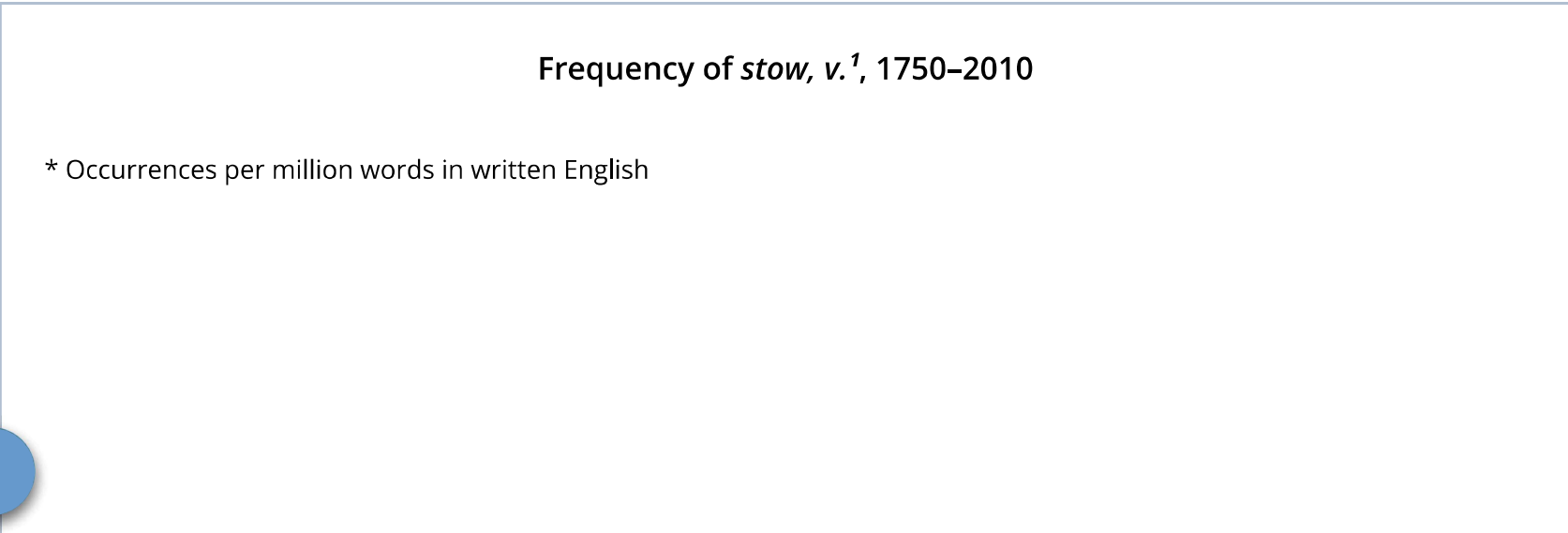
Variant forms

Past tense and participle **stowed** /stəʊd/ . Forms: Middle English **stau**, **staw**, **stew**, **stouwe**, **stue**, **stywe**, Middle English–1600s **stowe**, Middle English **stou**, **stowyn**, 1500s **stoe**, 1600s **stoaw**, **stooe**, Middle English– **stow**. *past participle* Middle English **i-stewid**, 1600s **stoad**.

Frequency

stow typically occurs about once per million words in modern written English.
stow is in frequency band 5, which contains words occurring between 1 and 10 times per million words in modern written English.
[More about OED's frequency bands](#)

Frequency data is computed programmatically, and should be regarded as an estimate.



Historical frequency series are derived from Google Books Ngrams (version 2), a data set based on the Google Books corpus of several million books printed in English between 1500 and 2010.

The overall frequency for a given word is calculated by summing frequencies for the main form of the word, any plural or inflected forms, and any major spelling variations.

For sets of homographs (distinct entries that share the same word-form, e.g. *mole*, n.¹, *mole*, n.², *mole*, n.³, etc.), we have estimated the frequency of each homograph entry as a fraction of the total Ngrams frequency for the word-form. This may result in inaccuracies.

Smoothing has been applied to series for lower-frequency words, using a moving-average algorithm. This reduces short-term fluctuations, which may be produced by variability in the content of the Google Books corpus.

Frequency of *stow*, v.¹, 2017–2024

* Occurrences per million words in written English



Modern frequency series are derived from a corpus of 20 billion words, covering the period from 2017 to the present. The corpus is mainly compiled from online news sources, and covers all major varieties of World English.

Smoothing has been applied to series for lower-frequency words, using a moving-average algorithm. This reduces short-term fluctuations, which may be produced by variability in the content of the corpus.

Compounds & derived words

Sort by Date (oldest first) ▾

bestow, v. c1315-

transitive (and absol.) To confer as a gift, present, give.

stowage, n. 1390-

The action or operation of stowing cargo on board ship, or goods in a warehouse, etc.

stowing, n.¹ c1440-

The action of the verb in various senses.

stowable, adj. 1610–

Capable of being stowed.

stowed, adj. 1674–

In senses of the verb; also stowed-away (stow, v.¹ 6).

stowsome, adj. 1674

Having position in space.

unstow, v. 1726–

transitive. To take out of stowage; to clear (a hold, etc.) of the articles stowed in it.

stower, n.² 1769–

One who stows; one who stows a ship, a stevedore; one of a fishing crew whose work is to stow the net; a miner whose work is to pack up stone.

restow, v. 1774–

transitive. To stow again.

stow-wood, n. 1846–

(See quotes.).

stow-board, n. 1849–

(See quotes.).

stow-master, n. 1857–

A man in charge of the stowing of a boat.

stow-road, n. 1886–**stow-down, n.**

The action of stowing down (cargo); that which is stowed down (see stow, v.¹ 4e).



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