

automatic

ADJECTIVE & NOUN

Etymology

Summary

A borrowing from Latin.
Etymon: Latin *automaticus*.

< **post-classical Latin** *automaticus* (1511 or earlier) < **classical Latin** *automatum* (see [automaton n.](#)) + *-icus* **-ic suffix**. Compare **French** *automatique* (1627 or earlier), **Spanish** *automático* (1736 or earlier), **Italian** *automatico* (1704 or earlier), **German** *automatisch* (1763). Compare earlier [automatical adj.](#)

Notes

Originally apparently with stress on the second syllable, on the model of the ultimate **Greek** base (see [automaton n.](#) and compare quot. [1599 at sense A.1](#)).

Meaning & use

ADJECTIVE

1. Of action, etc.: self-generated, spontaneous; (of a thing) self-acting; having the power of motion within itself. In later use (*Physiology*): having intrinsic activity that is not dependent upon external stimuli or central innervation; designating such activity; of or relating to such activity.
- 1599–

- 1599

So some [plants]..might please her eie..And by sweete vertues odor, sume her sent, With grace [automaticke](#), and redolent.
R. Roche, *Eustathia* sig. D
- 1808

He [*sc.* Davy] began by observing..that there was in truth no [automatic](#) machine in nature, that all was of Divine origin.
Athenæum May 455
- 1855

The winking of the eyes is essentially [automatic](#).
A. Bain, *Senses & Intellect* Introduction ii. 50
- 1870

It [*sc.* the apparatus] produces an effect which gives the spectator the idea that the lady is truly ‘[automatic](#)’, and can do as she pleases.
Popular Educator (new edition) vol. VI. 249/1

- 1877** We may therefore speak of the amœba as being irritable and automatic... [Note] In this work I use it [sc. automatic] in the older sense, as denoting an action of a body, the causes of which appear to lie in the body itself.
M. Foster, *Text Book of Physiology* Introduction 2
- 1905** The heart-muscle continuing to contract rhythmically, even after removal from the body and without the aid of any external stimulus is said to be automatic in action.
A. P. Brubaker, *Text-book Human Physiology* xii. 299
- 1940** Automatic control of rhythm in the nervous system occurs in other animals.
G. S. Carter, *General Zoology of Invertebrates* xvi. 301
- 2004** Gastric motility and secretion are, to some extent, automatic.
A. E. Jeukendrup & M. Gleeson, *Sport Nutrition* iv. 95/1

physiology

mechanics

2.a. Of a mechanical figure or device: that is an automaton; self-acting once set in motion. Now **1686-** rare (in later use passing into sense **A.2b**). Cf. earlier **automatical** *adj.* 1.

- 1686** Their [sc. physicians'] Eyes fixt and immoveable, their Bodies stiff, like automatick Statues walking up and down.
G. Harvey, *Conclave of Physicians* (ed. 2) ii. viii. 77
- 1786** M. de Kempellan, the inventor of the automatic chess-player.
M. Haüy, *Ess. Educ. Blind* vi. 240 (note)
- 1799** There are more puppets exhibited than at the show, full as automatic, and insignificant.
translation of J. G. Zimmerman, *Refl. Men & Things* 140
- 1802** The difference between an animal and an automatic statue.
W. Paley, *Natural Theology* iii. 21
- 1852** A water clock, which struck the hours, and was adorned with automatic figures.
Life & Times Charlemagne (Relig. Tract Society) 164
- 1902** While passing through the village., Frank had purchased an automatic mouse. Being wound up, the mouse would run swiftly across the room.
'B. L. Standish', *Frank Merriwell's Chums* (1908) xxii. 135
- 2003** The ancient peoples of Asia and Egypt had 'automatic statues' which moved or spoke.
J. Shepherd et al., *Continuum Encycl. Popular Music of World* vol. II. 323/1

mechanics

2.b. Of a machine, appliance, etc.: that does not require an operator; that works by itself under **1821-** fixed conditions, with little or no direct human control. Hence of a process: based on or utilizing such devices. (Now the usual sense.)

Originally designating mechanisms resembling those of automatons, but from the early to mid 19th cent. applied to a wide variety of mechanically or electrically operated machines, appliances, tools, and systems (sometimes

opposed to *manual*: see **manual** *adj.* A.5).

- 1821** The Proprietors of the Apollonicon (an organ of immense powers, to which automatic machinery is..applied).
London Magazine March 339/2
- 1835** The finest model of an automatic manufacture of mixed chemistry is the five-coloured calico machine.
A. Ure, Philosophy of Manufactures 2
- 1844** By his [sc. Arkwright's] patent inventions the several organs of a spinning factory are united in one self-acting and self-supplying body—a system most truly automatic.
A. Ure, Recent Improvements in Arts, Manufactures, & Mines at Spinning
- 1850** Automatic or self-registration of periodical phenomena.
W. R. Grove, On Correlation of Physical Forces (ed. 2) 57
- 1871** There is no division of labour which has benefited more by the introduction of automatic machinery than that of the drilling and boring of metal.
J. Yeats, Technical History of Commerce iii. v. 370
- 1922** An automatic windscreen wiper.
Motor 21 November 831/3 (heading)
- 1962** An automatic washing machine may be designed to wash for four minutes, empty, and spin-dry for ten.
E. Bruton, Automation vi. 74
- 1976** Block signalling (manual and automatic), prohibiting the train from entering the next section of the track until the train ahead has left it.
J. Lukasiewicz, Railway Game 78
- 1997** A new machine for the automatic production of liquid leaven or sourdough.
Bakers' Review September 19/2
- 2002** The Nikon Coolpix 885 [camera]..is a good choice... It has both automatic and manual focus.
Which? September 40/1

2.c. Firearms and Gunnery. Of a weapon: self-loading and able to fire continuously until the ammunition is exhausted or the trigger is released. Also sometimes (of a pistol): = **semi-automatic** *adj.* A.2b.

1877-

- 1877** Smith & Wesson's automatic revolvers.
Independent (U.S.) 5 July 20/2
- 1902** In the modern 'automatic' machine gun the loading, firing, extracting, and ejecting are all performed automatically by the gun itself.
Encyclopædia Britannica vol. XXX. 401/2
- 1902** No nation has yet armed her forces with an automatic rifle.
Encyclopædia Britannica vol. XXXII. 649/2

- 1928** Traffic in revolvers and **automatics**.
Evening Standard 1 March 1 (heading)
- 1945** The proof of an **automatic** weapon is its ability to repeatedly perform its cycle.
C. E. Balleisen, *Principles of Firearms* xi. 123
- 1977** The 2,500 ton warship is armed with an **automatic** rapid fire 4.5 in. gun.
Navy News June 6
- 1991** Someone..passed a revolver into his hands. Not an **automatic** pistol, a wheel gun.
T. Mo, *Redundancy of Courage* (1992) viii. 81
- 2002** O'Neill..requested that his agents be commissioned to carry 'long guns'—rifles and **automatic** weapons—instead of just sidearms.
Esquire March 183/2

gunnery and firearms

2.d. Telecommunications. Of a telephone exchange or system: operated by automatic switches **1879–** and relays, without human involvement (now *historical*). Also: designating a telephone having a dial, so that a connection with another telephone can be made without human assistance (now *disused*).

- 1879** We..have jointly invented a certain new and useful **Automatic** Telephone-Exchange..so constructed and arranged that any member of the exchange may..place himself in direct communication with any disengaged member of the exchange.
M. D. Connolly et al., *U.S. Patent 222,458*
- 1914** In an **automatic** system of telephony it is required that the subscriber shall be able to obtain connection with any other subscriber without the intervention of an operator at the exchange.
W. Atkins, *Principles of Automatic Telephony* 1
- 1934** The **automatic** telephone..has not been an unqualified blessing.
Discovery March 58/2
- 1955** In an **automatic** exchange, the connexion to the required line is made by mechanical selectors.
Oxford Junior Encyclopedia vol. VIII. 433/2
- 1977** Switching theory..was developed to help design the relay-operated switching networks of **automatic** telephone systems.
Scientific American September 212/3
- 2001** Bell Telephone in Canada, following A T & T in the United States, installed no **automatic** switchboards..before 1924.
K. Roth, translation of J. G. Rens, *Invisible Empire* vii. 143

telephony

disused

historical

2.e. Motoring. Of the transmission or gears in a motor vehicle: changing automatically according to speed and acceleration. Hence of a vehicle: equipped with this facility.

1904–

- 1904** It is quite possible that in the near future Mr. Barber will be able to make an absolutely automatic gear of this kind for motor cars.
Auto 7 May 558
- 1908** New forms of the Sturtevant automatic transmission.
Horseless Age 8 January 40/1 (heading)
- 1926** An automatic gear box for automobiles that will do away with all manual gear shifts and greatly simplify the art of driving.
Science (American Association Advancem. Science) 12 February p. xiv
- 1946** The Hydra-Matic drive..combines the fluid drive with an automatic transmission that has four forward and one reverse speed.
W. H. Crouse, *Automotive Mechanics* xvii. 403
- 1954** These beautiful new Packards are truly challenging cars, with the finest proved power features in the industry..and Packard Ultramatic, designed..for use in Packard-built cars, and freely acknowledged by engineers as 'the finest of the automatic shifts'.
Life 19 April 19/1 (advertisement)
- 1980** On an automatic car with a flat battery use jump leads.
Know about your Car (A.A.) 284/1
- 2003** The Striker has a twin-disc, six-speed automatic transmission and power assists throughout.
Popular Science January 80/2

motoring

3. Of a physical process, attribute, or movement: (in early use) like that of an automaton; not motivated by intelligence or will; (later) occurring spontaneously, without conscious thought; instinctive; involuntary.

1694–

- 1694** Death, or a total dissolution of the Automatick Conjunction in Brute Animals, but in Mankind a separation of the Soul from the Body.
R. Blome in translation of A. Le Grand, *Entire Body Philosophy* ii.viii. x. 201/2
- 1742** The Presence of those Diseases in the Body irritated it to exert a Sort of Mechanical Impulse, or unconscious Automatic Motion, for their Removal.
translation of H. Boerhaave, *Academical Lectures on Theory of Physic* vol. I. 7
- 1797** He [sc. primitive man] might have moved his arms and legs in an automatic manner, but he would not have been able to rise from the ground [without divine intervention].
J. Priestley, *Observ. Increase Infidelity* (ed. 3) ix. 140
- 1845** Actions performed without the spontaneity of the agent, are automatic.
S. Smith, *Elementary Sketches of Moral Philosophy* (1850) xvii. 251

- 1871** The automatic nature of insects has only been maintained by those who have never observed them.
translation of F.-A. Pouchet, *Universe* 106
- 1908** There may be catatonic stupor, automatic obedience, and occasionally impulsive automatism.
Practitioner January 12
- 1940** In so far as it is automatic this behaviour demands no higher mental functions than the automatic behaviour of non-social insects.
G. S. Carter, *General Zoology of Invertebrates* xxi. 443
- 2006** Automatic behavior for which the patient has no memory is common to any confusional state.
E. Wyllie et al., *Treatment Epilepsy* (ed. 4) iii. xvi. 245/1

animals

- 4.** Of an action, thought, etc.: not characterized by active, voluntary, or conscious choice; occurring, happening, or done unthinkingly, esp. as a result of habit or convention. **1821-**

- 1821** Any law constructed on merely automatic and artificial principles, and not actuated by the living spring of conscience., is useless.
Edinburgh Review July 325
- 1854** Mechanical and automatic acts of devotion.
H. H. Milman, *History of Latin Christianity* vol. I. iii. vi. 425
- 1860** Stephen hardly knew..in what automatic way he got through the duties of politeness..until he was free and saw Maggie seated alone again.
'G. Eliot', *Mill on Floss* vol. III. vi. x. 153
- 1949** When one saw a scrap of waste paper lying about, it was an automatic action to lift the flap of the nearest memory hole and drop it in.
'G. Orwell', *Nineteen Eighty-four* i. 40
- 1953** I expected from him automatic obedience as from the other servants.
A. Hosain, *Phoenix Fled* 175
- 1991** The rules of social politeness..will lead us all to respond to enquiries after our health with an automatic 'Very well, thank you' when often we may be feeling poorly or even downright miserable.
S. Scrutton, *Counselling older People* (British National Corpus) 60
- 2001** Was it the automatic response of the self-employed writer who daren't turn down work, no matter how inappropriate?
J. Hamilton-Paterson, *Loving Monsters* (2002) iv. 52

- 5.a.** Of, relating to, or designating writing (or occasionally some other action or behaviour) apparently produced by a spiritual or psychic agency, usually through a medium. Cf. **automatism** *n.* 4a.

1855–

In quot. 1890 applied to the agent or medium.

1855 Being subsequently in the city of New York, I visited the public circles of Mrs. C., a medium for automatic writing.

R. Hare, *Experimental Investigation of Spirit Manifestations* 196

1887 Sometimes, following another tendency of automatic script, the signatures seem designed to meet expectation.

Proceedings of Society for Psychical Research 1886–7 vol. 4 212

1890 Certain trance-subjects who were also automatic writers.

W. James, *Principles of Psychology* vol. I. viii. 209

1909 'Julia's' decisions are given in two ways—sometimes clairaudiently, and sometimes by automatic handwriting.

Westminster Gazette 10 September 4/1

1957 Many cases of automatic writing and automatic speaking..have been recorded and investigated.

J. S. Huxley, *Religion without Revelation* i. 19

1966 Helena told me..about her being in contact with Bruce by automatic writing.

A. L. Rowse, *Diary* 18 September (2003) 375

2004 I've tried many techniques over the years—automatic writing, astral travelling, ouija boards and so on—without success.

Fortean Times March 53/1

spiritualism

- 5.b.** Designating a form of (esp. surrealist) art or, in extended use, poetry, etc., produced spontaneously from the subconscious mind, rather than through the conscious intention of the artist. Cf. **automatism** *n.* 4b.

1933–

1933 Automatic writing is worthless as literature, however interesting it may be to the psychologist & pathologist.

D. Thomas, *Letter* 11 November (1985) 51

1951 I deny that true automatic pictures can be produced while both the eye and hand in subconscious conjunction are said to be 'employed'.

A. Hill, *Painting out Illness* xi. 74

1960 The modern painter may use what he calls 'automatic painting', the creation of Rorschach blots, in order to stimulate the mind..towards fresh inventions.

E. H. Gombrich, *Art & Illusion* x. 358

- 1989** For the Surrealists, with their automatic writing and drawing, a more passive 'finding' and 'seeking' overpowered 'doing' and 'making'.
Modern Painters Autumn 82/3
- 2004** A magnificent poet who extended the range and credentials of automatic writing, then strove to take the Surrealist spirit to a broad and varied audience.
Times Literary Supplement 3 September 9/2

visual arts

6. † Relating to automatons; = **automatical** *adj.* 2. *Obsolete. rare.*

1859

- 1859** He gave me the automaton I was to repair... I began my first automatic labours.
F. C. L. Wraxall, translation of J. E. Robert-Houdin, *Memoirs* vol. I. v. 74

mechanics

7.a. Occurring as a matter of course and without debate; indisputable, guaranteed.

1877–

- 1877** This increase is due to automatic increments, of 203,447 *l.*, and 50,555 *l.*, in the Votes for Public Education.
Memorandum Civil Service Estimates 5 in *Accounts & Papers* (House of Commons) vol. IX. 679
- 1913** A Fund entirely contributory, or with compulsory contributions, would give a clergyman on his retirement an automatic right to a pension.
J. B. Ellis, *Diocese of Jamaica* xiv. 164
- 1939** The Government's revenue would be so great that extinction of the debt would be automatic.
Annual Register 1938 301
- 1943** When the Kinematograph Section was formed he was the automatic choice as Chairman.
Photographic Journal September 355/1
- 1959** In technical terms, the Vienna Coup consists of the play of the top-ranking card of a suit so that a card of lower rank will be correctly positioned as a one-card threat in an automatic squeeze.
T. Reese & A. Dormer, *Bridge Player's Dictionary* 248
- 1976** As a batsman, he would have been an automatic choice for any Test team of any period.
T. Bailey, *Sir Gary* (1977) vii. 69
- 1980** Until the late 1960s the Abitur..was a passport to automatic admission to university to study any subject.
Economist 23 August 41
- 2009** There never has been an automatic right to British citizenship.
Guardian (Nexis) 3 August 2

- 7.b.** Esp. of a penalty or sanction: imposed as a necessary and inevitable result of a fixed rule or particular set of circumstances. **1890–**

- 1890** An automatic penalty, imposed by laws which no legislative enactment can repeal.
Times 29 September 9/2
- 1920** Workers at the Heinz plant are never subjected to autocratic punishment—a wrong deed carries with it an automatic penalty.
Independent (U.S.) 17 January 116/3
- 1941** This used to be an automatic touchback and the ball was placed in play on the 20-yard line.
Daily Progress (Charlottesville, Virginia) 14 January 11
- 1973** On the Monte Carlo [Rally], two reports of excessive speeding mean automatic disqualification.
Guardian 26 January 13/1
- 1987** If proven, it could constitute gross misconduct for which the automatic penalty is summary dismissal.
Daily Telegraph 27 March 2/2
- 2004** The Court of Appeal for England and Wales reinterpreted the automatic sentence of life imprisonment for a second serious sexual or violent offence.
Modern Law Review vol. 67 551

NOUN

- 1.** Any of various automatic machines, tools, or appliances (usually identified contextually); a device that operates by itself with little or no direct human control. **1870–**

- 1870** In reply to the invitation..to explain my electrical mallet, I will confine myself to..the virtues it possesses over all other so-called automatics.
Dental Cosmos. vol. 12 635
- 1899** There are many..tools, solidly built, hand-operated in every detail, which..are better adapted than high-class automatics and semi-automatics.
Cassier's Magazine vol. 17 399/1
- 1917** Automatics used advantageously in the making of starter parts.
American Machinist vol. 47 17
- 1921** The full advantage of automatics will only be appreciated when a large number of automatic exchanges have been erected.
Conquest vol. 2 125
- 1938** Any flyrod reel will suffice, but I decidedly prefer an automatic.
Automobile & Trailer Trav. Magazine vol. 3 22

- 1947** Of all the **automatic** washing machines on the market today..only three were manufactured before the war, so that **automatics** are actually still new.
Popular Science Monthly July 121/2
- 1971** When printing presses were operated by hand, or were slow '**automatics**' compared with today's high-speed units.
R. Brewer, *Approach to Print* xii. 148
- 2004** Fine 27-jewel **automatics**..are usually priced well over \$2000 dollars but you can enter the rarified world of fine watch collecting for under \$200.
New York Times Magazine 4 April 58/3 (advertisement)

mechanics

2. Originally U.S. An automatic firearm.

1896–

- 1896** The United States Navy Department has recently adopted a form of machine gun which is known as the Colt **Automatic**.
Chambers's Journal 25 April 269/1
- 1899** A number of smaller rapid-fire pieces..including..a one-pounder Maxim-Nordenfeldt **automatic**.
Overland Monthly December 555/1
- 1913** You can protect your home and family with an unfailing defender—the ten-shot Savage **Automatic**.
Saturday Evening Post (Philadelphia) 22 February 57/3 (advertisement)
- 1914** I've even bought an **automatic**. I suppose..I should call it a gun.
G. Atherton, *Perch of Devil* ii. vii. 269
- 1920** A German **automatic** hung at his side.
Blackwood's Magazine August 154/1
- 1930** A sawed-off full in the chest an' half a dozen shots from an **automatic** as a chaser.
Saturday Evening Post 26 July 145/1
- 1945** Everything was thrown into it—grenades, **automatics**, bayonets, and rifle butts.
Diamond Track (Army Board, N.Z.) 35/1
- 1989** I miss my Python, but the Bureau's switching over to **automatics**.
T. Clancy, *Clear & Present Danger* xiii. 269
- 2004** He..pulled out an **automatic**, jacked a round into the gun, and stuck it into the customer's stomach.
D. Klinger, *Into Kill Zone* iv. 85

gunnery and firearms

U.S. English

hout article. The automatic mode of operation on a machine, motor vehicle, etc., which also has a manual setting. Cf. **manual** *n.* B.6.

1941–

- 1941** On **automatic**, this patented trigger release mechanism effects perfect timing of the bolt action in relation to feeding.
Popular Science Monthly April 10/1 (advertisement)
- 1942** Always take off and land in 'Automatic'.
Tee Emm (Air Ministry) vol. 2 89
- 1978** If the infant is to remain under the radiant warmer more than 10 minutes, turn the control to **automatic**.
American Journal of Nursing vol. 78 1696/1
- 1997** Our class-exclusive 5-speed Tiptronic..gearbox that lets you cruise in **automatic** or shift for higher performance.
Vanity Fair (New York) September 102 (advertisement)
- 2009** The joysticks are worked with their thumbs and they [sc. the soldiers] can fire a single shot, multi-shot or switch to **automatic**.
Sun (Nexis) 23 July 20

4. Originally U.S. A motor vehicle, esp. a car, having automatic transmission.

1949–

- 1949** Ford's **automatic**.
Newsweek (U.S.) 24 October 65/1 (heading)
- 1966** The only **automatic** we have tested is the little Dutch-built Daf.
Motoring Which? October 124
- 1984** The BX range has recently been expanded with the inclusion of a diesel version, and there will be estates and **automatics** soon.
Which? October (Car Supplement) 17/2
- 2005** Her courtesy car arrived during Thursday morning... It was an **automatic**, which needed a bit of getting used to.
R. Tope, *Cotswold Killing* xviii. 274

motoring

U.S. English

5. *American Football*. A default offensive play called at the line of scrimmage (typically by the quarterback) to replace the play initially planned; = **audible** *n.* B.2.

1957–

- 1957** Getty got the jump on the defence several times by calling **automatics** as he came out over the ball.
Winnipeg Free Press 1 October 24/3
- 1963** At calling **automatics**..Norman had no superior.
R. Smith, *Pro Football* xiv. 156

3/14/25, 8:13 AMautomatic, adj. & n. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary

1971

The automatic is now the fad in football. The quarterback, after identifying the next play in the huddle, often changes it when he sees the arrangement of the defence at the line of scrimmage.
B. Parrish, *They call it Game* 94

2007

The automatic was actually called for Vern Kearney but I looked to the left and saw that a little tiny DB had man-to-man coverage on Andre.
Sarasota (Florida) Herald-Tribune (Nexis) 17 November (Sports section) c8

American football

Pronunciation

BRITISH ENGLISH

/ˌɔːtəˈmætɪk/

aw-tuh-MAT-ik

U.S. ENGLISH

/ˌɔdəˈmædɪk/

aw-duh-MAD-ik

/ˌɔdoʊˈmædɪk/

aw-doh-MAD-ik

/ˌɑdəˈmædɪk/

ah-duh-MAD-ik

/ˌɑdoʊˈmædɪk/

ah-doh-MAD-ik

Pronunciation keys

Forms

Variant forms

1500s	automaticke
1600s	automatick
1700s–	automatic

Frequency



automatic is one of the 5,000 most common words in modern written English. It is similar in frequency to words like *comparable*, *diminish*, *migration*, *sodium*, and *warning*.

It typically occurs about 20 times per million words in modern written English.

automatic is in frequency band 6, which contains words occurring between 10 and 100 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.

Frequency of *automatic, adj. & n.*, 1750–2010

* Occurrences per million words in written English

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.



Frequency of *automatic, adj. & n.*, 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.

Compounds & derived words

Sort by Date (oldest first)

automative, adj. 1794–

= automatic, adj. (in various senses).

automatic machine, n. 1808–

Any machine that operates automatically; (in later use esp.) a vending machine.

automatize, v. 1828–

transitive. To make (an action) automatic; (now esp.) to make (language, behaviour) habitual, or reproducible without conscious thought.

automatic shut-off, n. 1852–

A facility for automatically stopping the operation of a device, machine, etc., in certain circumstances.

automatic brake, n. 1858–

brake which operates automatically; esp. one which automatically halts goods wagons or passenger carriages which have accidentally become detached...

automatic tension, n. 1864–

A device on a sewing machine that automatically adjusts the tension of the thread.

quasi-automatic, adj. 1870–**non-automatic, adj.** 1872–**automaticity, n.** 1873–

The quality, state, or condition of being automatic (in various senses).

automation, n. 1874–

The action or process of introducing automatic equipment or devices into a manufacturing or other process or facility; (also) the fact of making...

fully-automatic, adj. 1889–

Designating a system, device, or machine whose function is completely automatic; spec. (of a firearm) that loads itself and fires continuously (cf...

semi-automatic, adj. & n. 1890–

Partially automatic; spec. designating a system, device, or machine whose function is not completely automatic.

automatic helmsman, n. 1895–

A device which automatically keeps a ship on a preset heading; = automatic pilot, n. 2b; cf. iron mike, n.

automatic parachute, n. 1897–

A parachute that opens automatically, esp. one operated by a static line.

automatic pilot, n. 1897–

A device for controlling an aircraft and maintaining a set course without the intervention of the pilot. Cf. autopilot, n.

auto, adj. 1903–

Of a device, function, etc.: that operates automatically, without manual intervention. Frequently in fully auto.

automatic train control, n. 1904–

Automatic regulation or control of the speed of a train; any of various signalling or braking systems used effect this (frequently attributive).

automatic stabilizer, n. 1909–

a. Originally and chiefly Aeronautics a device in an aircraft or ship for automatically maintaining a set attitude; b. Economics an economic...

automatic landing, n. 1910–

landing of an aircraft that is automatic in some way; spec. landing in which a pilot is guided by instruments rather than by visual observation; an...

auto, n.⁶ 1916-

A mode of operation in which a particular function of a piece of equipment is performed automatically rather than manually; the setting which prompts...

automatic observer, n. 1920-

A means of photographing cockpit instrument readings at intervals, usually automatically.

automatic frequency control, n. 1921-

The automatic stabilization of the frequency or tuning of a circuit; a means for achieving this; abbreviated AFC.

automatic dialler, n. 1922-

A device that dials telephone numbers automatically; spec. = autodialler, n.

automatic teller, n. 1924-

Any machine that performs the functions of a bank teller; (now esp.) a machine that automatically provides cash and performs some other banking...

automatic volume control, n. 1924-

= automatic gain control, n.; abbreviated AVC.

automatic gain control, n. 1925-

The automatic regulation of the gain or amplification in an electronic device; a means for achieving this; abbreviated AGC.

electromatic, adj. 1932-

Designating electrical equipment operated automatically, esp. traffic lights that respond to the passage of vehicles.

automatic direction finder, n. 1938-

A navigational aid used in aircraft and ships which continuously and automatically displays the bearing of the nearest radio beacon; abbreviated ADF.

automatic following, n. 1946-

The automatic following by a radar of a chosen target; = auto-following, adj.; frequently attributive.

automatic translation, n. 1949-

= machine translation, n.

automated, adj. 1952-

Converted so as to operate automatically; that has been automated; automatic.

Instamatic, n. 1962-

A proprietary name for a type of self-loading camera. Also figurative.

automatic teller machine, n. 1967-

Automatic teller, n.; abbreviated ATM.

-matic, comb. form

Forming words (typically proprietary or brand names) denoting devices which work automatically or mechanically.

- About OED
- Historical Thesaurus
- Editorial policy
- Updates
- Institutional account management
- Accessibility
- Contact us
- Upcoming events
- Case studies
- Media enquiries

- How to use the OED
- Purchasing
- Help with access
- World Englishes
- Contribute
- Oxford University Press
- Oxford Languages
- Oxford Academic
- Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide

[Cookie policy](#) [Privacy policy](#) [Legal notice](#)
Copyright © 2025 Oxford University Press

