willy-nilly, *adv.* and *adj.*

**Pronunciation:** /ˈwɪlɪnɪli/

**Forms:** Also 16 *wille nille*, 17 *willi nilhi*.

**Frequency (in current use):**

**Etymology:** = *will I*, *nill I* (*he*, *ye*) 'be I (*he, ye*) willing, be I (*he, ye*) unwilling'; see *WILL* v. VI., *NILL* v.

**A. adv.**

Whether it be with or against the will of the person or persons concerned; whether one likes it or not; willingly or unwillingly, *nolens volens*.

1608 T. MIDDLETON *Trick to catch Old-one* 1. sig. B. Thou shalt trust mee spite of thy teeth, furnish me with some money, wille nille.

1797 E. BERKELEY in G. M. Berkeley *Poems* Pref. p. ccxxix. But her Ladyship would, *willi nilhi*, constantly join the one who drank the waters every morning, and converse with her.

1807 *Salmagundi* 25 Apr. 166 He was sure, willy nilly, to be drenched with a deluge of decoctions.

1818 J. BROWN *Psyche* 121 From whence it follows, will y' nil y', The thought of your's is mighty silly.

1884 A. GRIFFITHS *Chron. Newgate* II. vii. 306 He..conceived an idea of carrying her off and marrying her willy nilly at Gretna Green.

1898 L. STEPHEN *Stud. of Biographer* II. vii. 272 You are engaged in the game willy-nilly, and cannot be a mere looker-on.

**B. adj.**

1. That is such, or that takes place, whether one will or no.

1877 TENNYSON *Harold* v. i. And someone saw thy willy-nilly nun Vying a tress against our golden fern.

1880 *Cornhill Mag.* Feb. 182 All willy-nilly spinsters went to the canine race to be consoled.

1882 TENNYSON *Promise of May* II. 119 If man be only A willy-nilly current of sensations.

2. *erron.* Undecided, shilly-shally.

1883 F. GALTON *Inquiries into Human Faculty* 57 The willy-nilly disposition of the female in matters of love is as apparent in the butterfly as in the man.

1899 W. BESANT *Orange Girl* II. vi. 194 Let us have no more shilly shally, willy nilly talk.
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