

## Using a dictionary

Sometimes you will need to look up the meaning of an unfamiliar word in a dictionary.

To find a meaning quickly, you need to know how a dictionary is organised.

Find out more about using a dictionary in this activity.



This activity looks at using a dictionary to find out the meaning of words.

You will learn:

- about the general layout of the dictionary
- what information is included in a typical dictionary entry
- how to find and check the meanings of words.

You will need a dictionary for this activity.

## Using a dictionary

Dictionaries are arranged in alphabetical order. This helps you to find a word quickly.

A quick way to find a word you need, is to remember approximately where it will appear in the dictionary – the first half, near the middle or the second half.

For example, words beginning with **B** will be in the first half. Words beginning with **M** will be in the middle and words beginning with **V** will be near the end.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

belligerent

malevolent

vulnerable

The words on each page are also arranged in alphabetical order of second, third, fourth letters and so on.

### Practice 1

Put these words in the order they would appear in a dictionary:

consequence

confront

conform

considerate

co-operate

compartment

### Dictionary entries

The information that follows each word in a dictionary is called an entry.

Each entry gives you information about the word. Abbreviations are often used in dictionary entries.

**Compartment** *n* ① a separate part of a container or a structure; a separated section of a railway carriage. ② (in Heraldry) a grassy mound or support painted below a shield. *v* divide into compartments.

## Using a dictionary

Many words have several meanings. The dictionary gives you useful information about the meanings of:

- different types of a word (or word classes)
- words used in specific subject areas
- words used in typical phrases.

### Different types of word

If you can tell whether the word is being used as a verb, a noun or an adjective, it can help you to choose the definition you need.

Type of word	Abbreviation	Meaning
Noun	n.	A noun is the name of something, for example: a <b>television</b> , a <b>watch</b> , a <b>cook</b> .
Verb	v.	Verbs describe an action or a state. I <b>watch</b> television; I <b>have</b> a television, I <b>cook</b> dinner.
Adjective	adj.	Adjectives are describing words that describe nouns. It's a <b>new</b> television. I had a <b>cooked</b> breakfast.

### Practice 2

- 1 Different dictionaries use different abbreviation styles.

In your dictionary, find out the abbreviations for the word types in the table. If they are different, add them to the table. (Information about entry styles is often at the front of the dictionary.)

- 2 Pick out the **adjective** in these sentences:

- a. Mike and his wife went through an acrimonious divorce.
- b. All seasoned cooks know a lot about seasoning.

Now look up the meanings of the words.

- 3 In this sentence, is **break** used as noun or verb? Use your dictionary to check.

I'm going to have a **break** shortly.

## Using a dictionary

### Words related to subject areas

Dictionary entries also include words used in particular specialist subject areas such as science, the arts, sports, mathematics and medicine. This helps when you are reading information about a particular subject.

### Words used in phrases

Dictionary entries also include phrases that are in common use, particularly in spoken language. You may come across these sorts of phrases in newspaper articles and fictional books. Some examples are: *hit the spot*; 'has a light *touch*' and '*pop* the question'.

#### Practice 3

- 1 Use your dictionary to answer these questions:
  - a. What does the word 'rough' mean in golfing terms?
  - b. In music, what is a 'tenor'?
  - c. What is a 'stigma' in medicine?
- 2 Look up the word 'rough' in your dictionary again.

What do the typical phrases mean?

  - a. He was used to **taking the rough with the smooth.**
  - b. It's a **rough and ready solution.**

#### Choosing the correct meaning:

When you check an unfamiliar word in a dictionary remember to choose the meaning of the word as it is used in the text.

- Ⓐ Read the sentence in your text a few times to get an idea of the subject matter.
- Ⓑ See if you can identify how the word is being used (for example, as a verb, noun or adjective).

## Using a dictionary

### Check your skills

Use your own dictionary or this extract to help you answer the questions.

**dynamic adj** ① (when used to describe a process) continually changing and active; full of energy and new ideas. ② (in Physics) to do with forces producing motion or movement. ③ (in Linguistics) describes a verb that expresses an unfinished action, event or process. ④ (in Electronics) describes a device that needs the application of a voltage from time to time to refresh its memory. ⑤ (in Music) relates to the volume of sound made by an instrument or human voice. **n** ① a driving force. ② (in Music) also known as **dynamics**.

- 1 How many definitions are there for the word 'dynamic' as an adjective?
- 2 What is the meaning of the word 'dynamic' in this sentence?

We are looking for sales assistants to join our growing company.

Experience is not required as training will be given, but applicants should be enthusiastic and **dynamic**.

- 3 A. What is the meaning of the word 'dynamic' in this sentence?

If a melody is repeated, the singer can make it more interesting by using a range of **dynamic** changes from soft to loud.

- B. 'Dynamic changes' here means changes in what?

energy

ideas

motion

voltage

volume

## Using a dictionary

### Answers

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#### Practice 1

The order should be:

compartment, conform, confront, consequence, considerate, co-operate

#### Practice 2

- 1 No answers
- 2 a. The adjective is 'acrimonious'. It means angry and bitter, marked by strong resentment.  
b. The adjective is 'seasoned'. It means experienced.
- 3 The word 'break' is used as noun.

#### Practice 3

- 1 a. In golfing terms 'rough' means the area of longer grass around the edges of the golf course.  
b. In music, a 'tenor' is the highest male voice.  
c. In medicine, a 'stigma' is a visible sign or characteristic of a disease.
- 2 a. The phrase 'taking the rough with the smooth' means accepting the bad and the good in life.  
b. The phrase 'rough and ready' means just about good enough for the purpose.

#### Check your skills

- 1 There are five definitions for 'dynamic' in the extract. Your dictionary may have more or fewer.
- 2 The meaning 'full of energy and new ideas' makes the most sense in this context as it is about a person and is similar to the word 'enthusiastic'.
- 3 a. Meaning five is the correct meaning, this is: '(in Music) relates to the volume of sound made by an instrument or human voice'.
- 3 b. 'Dynamic changes' in the context given means changes in volume.