

UNIT 40 Using a dictionary

Dictionaries

Dictionaries list words in alphabetical order. They give the meanings of words and other information such as the pronunciation, the part of speech, the plural forms of nouns, the origins of words and different ways a word may be used. Dictionaries come in book or electronic form.

Use a dictionary to:

- check the meaning of words you read
- check the spelling of words you write
- check the pronunciation of words you say
- improve your vocabulary.

Use a recent edition of a dictionary. Dictionaries are continually updated as new words become part of the language.

donkey *noun* (plural **donkeys**) an animal that looks like a small horse with long ears.

The word in bold at the beginning of an entry is the headword, or word being defined in the dictionary. Headwords are arranged in alphabetical order.

The part of speech is shown in italics.

The plural form of the word is given where there might be any doubt. In this case, it is a reminder that some words ending in **-ey** take **-s** in the plural and others take **-ies**.

mould¹ *noun* a hollow container of a particular shape, in which a liquid or soft substance is put to set into this shape.

mould² *verb* make something have a particular shape or character.

mould³ *noun* a fine furry growth of very small fungi. **mouldy** *adjective*.

The small number above the headword indicates that this word has more than one meaning and will have more than one entry.

There are three entries for mould. The first is for mould used as a noun. The second is for mould used as a verb. The third is a different meaning of mould as a noun and is followed by an adjective relating to that meaning.

ionosphere (say uy-on-uh-sfeer) *noun* a region of the upper atmosphere, containing ions.

The pronunciation is shown in brackets. A hyphen is placed between syllables, and the accented syllable is shown in bold. In this case, the vowel sounds in the four syllables are **uy** as in light, **o** as in top, **uh** as in above and **ee** as in beer.

Dictionaries contain a pronunciation guide that explains the various sounds.

ugly *adjective* (**uglier**, **ugliest**)

1. unpleasant to look at; not beautiful.

2. hostile and threatening, *The crowd was in an ugly mood.* **ugliness** *noun* [from Old Norse *uggligr* = frightening]

The bracketed words are the comparative and superlative forms of the adjective. These are only given if they are irregular or if their spelling is not obvious.

The example in italics shows how the second meaning of the word is used and clarifies its meaning.

gilgie (say jil-gee) *noun* (Australian) a small freshwater crayfish. [from Nyungar *jilgi*]

The origin of words may be shown in square brackets.

Practice

If possible, refer to a range of dictionaries when completing these exercises.

1 In your notebook, write sentences that show three different meanings of the word **put** used as a verb.

A 2 Using a dictionary, explain the meaning of each of these expressions connected with the word cut.

a cut and dried _____

b cut corners _____

c cut in _____

d cut off _____

e cut back _____

A 3 Look in the dictionary for words that start with the given letters.

a A fl ____ is a smoke-duct in a chimney.

b Gyp ____ is a chalk-like substance from which plaster of Paris is made.

c To hoo _____ is to deceive.

d A ki ____ is a small bird with a long beak that dives to catch fish.

e Agr _____ is the process of cultivating land on a large scale and rearing livestock.

A 4 Match the nouns listed with their related words from the list.

computing, animal, rock, clothing, journey, water, flower, insect

a megabit _____ **d** itinerary _____ **g** hyacinth _____

b hornet _____ **e** merino _____ **h** hydrophobia _____

c kimono _____ **f** granite _____

A 5 In groups, say each of these aloud and see if you can work out the word it represents. You may need to refer to the guide to pronunciation in your dictionary.

a **proo**-vuhn _____ **d** moh-**zay**-ik _____

b **ray**-siz-uhm _____ **e** hoh-muh-**jee**-nee-uhs _____

c tuy-**pog**-ruh-fee _____ **f** kuh-**tas**-truh-fee _____

6 In groups and without looking in a dictionary, write your own definitions of these words. Then share your definitions with the class and vote for your favourites. Finally, check the definitions given in the dictionary and discuss the ways in which they differ from yours.

a blanket _____

b teddy bear _____

c pyjamas _____

d pillow _____

e quilt _____

f sheet _____