

Dictionary Reference Skills

Introduction

Dictionaries are among the most readily available, widely used, and cheapest learning resources ... [but] they are also among the most difficult to use (Wright 1998: 5).

A dictionary is a friend, philosopher and guide for a student intent upon exploring the beauty of a language at different levels. It can be of various types, depending upon the level and purpose of the users. We have Children's dictionaries, learner's dictionaries, advanced learner's dictionaries, picture dictionaries (dictionaries with pictures) bilingual: English/mother language, monolingual: English-English, specialised (e.g. Business English), thesaurus, general encyclopedia and many more. They can be used for etymology (the history of the word), spelling, meaning, grammar, pronunciation and stress, usage (examples), derivatives, compounds (e.g. "guidance" and "guide-book" are derived from "guide"), phrasal verbs (e.g. get up), idioms (e.g. head over heels) and collocations (e.g. fill in a form). Besides they can be used to look up words, find and explore meanings, choosing the right collocation, idiom and phrasal verb, choosing the right word from the context.

Though a dictionary contains words from all branches of knowledge, it can very well be used as an important tool for the learning of language. The entries in the dictionaries, as we know, provide information about the guide words (the words at the top of each page), class, number, gender, tense forms, syllable-divisions, pronunciation, idioms, phrases, collocations and origins of the words given. They can be simple and complex in terms of the matter and manner of presentation. New dictionaries published by Oxford and Collins are flexible enough to accommodate all possible uses of the dictionaries. The Oxford Picture Dictionary, for example, comes with a multi-media CD-ROM. This interactive, multimedia CD-ROM brings the words and illustrations to life with sound and animation. Its rich assortment of games, exercises, and activities makes it flexible for use in conjunction with the Dictionary or on its own. The theme suitable for the secondary and adult curricula, has a strong job-skills strand. It can be used in classrooms, in language labs, or at home, and it can be easily adapted to individual, pair, or

small group work. Like wise The Longman Active Study has many exciting features that actively encourage the student to speak, read and write better English .It is claimed to be the world's first Production Dictionary .

Used appropriately, the dictionary can be an invaluable tool for learners of a foreign language; without proper skills, however, the dictionary can turn into a hindrance . Many language learners lack appropriate skills and hardly receive any dictionary training . Dictionaries have to an extent been side-lined by the communicative methodologies that have dominated language teaching in recent years. Formulating hypotheses and trying them out is seen as the basis of much learning and making mistakes is accepted as a natural part of the learning process. But with dictionaries we tend to expect right answers, exact meanings, correct spelling and pronunciation, and there is no scope for error. Many teachers believe dictionaries to be books that are consulted in private, for individual learning problems. Tickoo (1989) believes years of neglecting vocabulary and its teaching, and of criticising the learning of words in isolation have fostered negative attitudes towards dictionaries. Students fail to exploit the immense amount of information provided since they have received "insufficient help on how to make the best use of dictionaries" (p.iii). He therefore calls for better training, of teachers, and even more so of users, and claims that the recent developments in learners' dictionaries require an even "higher degree of ... dictionary literacy" .

In recent years more attention has been paid to deliberate instruction with or without the use of such teaching aids as Dictionary Workbooks .However, very little is known still about the behaviour and preferences of dictionary users, and the complex operations involved in dictionary consultation . Nowadays computation has revolutionized not only the dictionary-making process but also both the conception and treatment of reference systems. Apart from the use of multimedia , the varied possibilities of search and access methods have transformed the ways of exploring the dictionary. Access and retrieval of information are no longer determined by the internal, traditionally alphabetic, organization of the dictionary or the structure of the input. However, the demands on the user of such a dictionary are also greater as the emphasis is shifted to navigating relationships across and within entries .

The Dictionary Tour

Before working on the tasks, students should be given a dictionary tour, which can last for about twenty to thirty minutes. The tour should mainly demonstrate the most important facilities available in the dictionary. It is useful to find out whether particular features, such as codes and symbols, abbreviations and technical terms are familiar to the students. The various sections of the dictionary should be shown to the students so that students are able to either explore the whole dictionary for a specific term or to confine themselves to particular parts of an entry.

Interpreting Entry Information/Sub-skills of Dictionary Reference

1. Distinguishing the component parts of the entry

Students should be able to distinguish between the different components of an entry like its syllabication, pronunciation, history, parts of speech, collocations, definitions, idiomatic uses etc. Teacher should take care to acquaint the students with the different components of the entries before taking up any activity on dictionary reference skills. This will help the students make use of the dictionary in more meaningful ways.

2. Finding information about the spelling of words

Regular use of a dictionary (preferably monolingual) can help students improve their spelling mistakes. Division of the words into syllables facilitates their understanding of the word structure and the use of different affixes. Teachers should introduce the students to the use of affixes before giving them any assignment on this skill. Similarly they can also make use of spelling dictionaries and acquaint the students with the intriguing words.

3. Interpreting the IPA and pronunciation of words

Understanding the pronunciation of words is as important as comprehending the meaning of a word. Students will be lost in wilderness if they are given any assignment without prior knowledge of the graphic symbols adopted by International Phonetic Association and their corresponding sounds, preferably with examples. The symbol /u:/ for example will be better understood when it is taught with examples where the sound has been used (in words like fool,

tool , cool) .Students should be able to distinguish between alphabets of English and the phonetic alphabets , understand the formation of words with the help of phonetic symbols .

4. Interpreting grammar and syntax information

Getting the meanings of words in isolation doesn't serve any purpose because words become meaningful only in contexts , expressed in the form of sentences and utterances . Careful observation of the grammatical function of a word in a sentence and the arrangement of words in sentences can guide a student in the construction of similar sentences in different contexts .The teacher , as a facilitator , should help the students distinguish between the words belonging to different parts of speech and their respective functions .

5. Interpreting the definition(s)

Interpretation of definitions is central to the understanding the use of words .Misleading definitions can lead the students astray .The word *cat* , for example , if defined as ' a member of the feline group of animals' will be more difficult than a simple definition like ' a domestic animal' . Students should be properly trained to distinguish between the right and wrong interpretation of a particular word .

6. Understanding and deriving information from examples

Examples provided in a dictionary fill up the information gaps in our understanding of a particular idea or concept .Looking at the information regarding the different types of houses , we are able to understand how people in different societies and cultures have different types of houses .Every information given in a dictionary regarding a particular entry clarifies and completes our understanding .

7. Interpreting information about idiomatic use

Words are not always used in their literary sense .Very often we tend to use them in idiomatic expressions to express different nuances of meaning . The literary meaning of the expression , 'to beat about the bush' has nothing to do with its figurative or idiomatic meaning , i.e to bluff .use of such linguistic devices enhances the quality of ones writing but care should be taken to

avoid excessive use of these .Used in excess they can mar the beauty of a text and hinder communication.

8.Interpreting restrictive labels

Knowing a word depends upon its recognition with reference to the restrictive levels used for it at the beginning. If the restrictive level for an entry is noun , a student shouldn't expect a verb from such an entry .The different definitions of the noun form of the word can be used in different contexts .

9.Finding out information about collocations, synonyms and antonyms

Words don't always occur in isolation .They also occur in collocation with other words to express a different meaning altogether .The collocation 'as cold as cucumber' , for example , is more suggestive than the simple expression 'very cold' .Similarly synonyms and antonyms can be equally bewildering for learners , particularly learners learning English as a foreign language .Some dictionaries provide the synonyms and antonyms of the entries but many don't .Hence care should be taken to acquaint the students with the concept of synonyms and antonyms before they are taken to task .

10.Knowing how to carry out cross-references / use hypertext links

Cross –references or hyper-links are like the shortcuts on highways jammed with traffic .If an entry is flooded with a lot of components , cross references help us to get straight to the component we are looking for .Students should know how to make out the messages/find out the meanings from cross references .Teacher can show some examples to the students to ease their understanding .

11.Distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information

Choosing the right information from the various information provided under one entry is crucial to the understanding of the meaning of a word in a given context .The meaning of the word 'band' ,for instance ,can be 1. an elastic rubber band 2. a group of people 3. an orchestra

.The right user of the dictionary should be able to relate the right meaning with the right word in the right context .

12.Referring to additional dictionary information in front matter or appendices

Students should be able to make use of the supplementary material provided at the front or at the end of the dictionary .These parts help them understand the entries with proper guidance .The guide to pronunciation , spelling rules and list of irregular verbs are frequently given in the front portions or in appendices .They function as kind of pointers in leading users to the right entry in the right way .

Activities which can be taken up to teach Dictionary Reference Skills

Create a Class Pictionary

Invite students to create dictionary entries for content-area vocabulary with illustrations to help define each word. Pictionaries can be an on-going tool for making new words come alive. Select words from your science or social studies unit and assign one or more to each student. Show them how to create a pictionary page for their word that includes the following:

- a definition
- the part of speech
- the etymology
- a picture
- a sentence using the word

Work with students to compile the pages into alphabetical order, staple the pages together, and add a colorful cover. Students can also read the pictionary to study for tests.

Daffy Definitions

Challenge the class to pick out a correct definition among several false ones. Select a word from the dictionary and write it on the board. Under the word, list four definitions include one that is real and three distractors. Label the definitions AD. Ask students to read the meanings carefully and record the letter for the correct definition. Let them check their responses by

looking the word up in the dictionary. Once students are familiar with this activity, let them take turns selecting words and writing definitions to fool their classmates!

Dictionary Scavenger Hunt

Help students become familiar with the different parts of a dictionary entry. Divide the class into pairs. Challenge them to use the dictionary to find and record various words based on a list of clues. For example, ask students to find a word with French origins, a pronoun, an entry that includes an illustration, a word with four syllables, or a word that is used both as a noun and a verb. The winning team can create their own list for the class!

Definition Patrol

Every week, assign one or two students to be on "Dictionary Duty." During the day, whenever the class comes across an unfamiliar word during activities such as reading aloud, the student on duty will find the definition and read it to the class. After discussing the words, mark them in the classroom dictionary using a highlighter. By the end of the year, the class can see how many new words they learned!

ABC Order

Using a dictionary requires students to understand alphabetical order. To give them practice with this skill, set up an Alphabetizing Center with objects such as cereal boxes, candy bar wrappers, baseball/trading cards, student photos (labeled with names), and children's books. Once students become comfortable alphabetizing, challenge them to a race. Using a timer or a stopwatch, time students while they sort their objects in the correct order. The student who finishes his or her object group first is the winner!

Areas Where The Dictionary Reference Skills May Be Put To Use

Spelling and Syllables

The spelling of the main word is usually given first in **bold** type. In good dictionaries the word is also divided into syllables. The word *developer* has two syllables: *de-velop*. Spellings of words based on this word are given at the end of the entry. The word *develop* changes form and spelling to become *developer*, which has four syllables, *de-vel-op-er*.

PRACTICE

Use a dictionary to break the following words into syllables. In the spaces provided, rewrite each word, placing a dot (·) between the syllables.

Pronunciation symbols

Pronunciation symbols indicate the sounds of consonants and vowels. Dictionaries provide pronunciation keys so that we can understand the symbols used in the pronunciation guide to a word. Below is a sample pronunciation key. Different dictionaries use different symbols in their pronunciation keys, so we should be sure to check the key of the dictionary we are using.

EXAMPLES

\ k\ kitten, t table \ r\ further \ a\ ash \ ˘ a\ ace \ ä\ mop, mar
\ a u\ out \ ch\ chin \ e\ bet \ ˘ e\ easy \ g\ go \ i\ hit \ ˘ i\ ice \ j\ job
\ \ sing \ ˘ o\ go \ ˘ o\ law \ ˘ oi\ boy \ th\ the \ ü\ loot \ ˘ u\ foot \ y\ yet \ z\ vision

Note that each letter and symbol is followed by a sample word. The sample word tells you how that letter and symbol sounds. For example, the long *a* sounds like *a* in *ace*. And the short *i* has the sound of the *i* in *bit*. The symbol that looks like an upside down *e* (˘) is called a *schwa*. The schwa has a sound like *uh*, as in *about*.

Parts of Speech

Parts of speech indicate how a word functions in a sentence. Dictionary entries tell us what part of speech a word is—noun, verb, adjective, and so on. The part of speech is abbreviated and printed in italics. Every dictionary provides a full list of abbreviations. The following are the most common abbreviations for the parts of speech:

EXAMPLES

Adj- adjective *n*- noun
Adv- adverb *prep*- preposition
Conj- conjunction *pron* pronoun
Interj- Interjection *v-verb*,
vi-verb intransitive, *vt- verb transitive*

Definitions

Most words have more than one meaning. When there is more than one definition, each meaning is numbered. Many times the dictionary also provides examples of sentences in which the word is used.

Three definitions are given for the word *degree*. In the spaces provided, write the number of the definition that best fits its meaning in each sentence.

1. A step or stage in a process
2. A unit of measurement for angles and curves
3. A title conferred on students by a college, university, or professional school upon completion of a program of study

A. Joanne changed her physical fitness activities by *degrees*; she began with short 5-minute walks and built up to 30-minute walks every day of the week.

B. John received his associate of arts *degree* from a community college and his bachelor of arts degree from a four-year university.

C. If two triangles are similar, their corresponding angles have the same number of degrees.

A. The correct answer is “a step or stage in a process” (1).

B. The correct answer is “a title conferred on students by a college, university, or professional school upon completion of a program of study” (3).

C. The correct answer is “a unit of measurement for angles and curves” (2).

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Textbook Aids for Learning Content Words

Many students think they should be able to pick up a textbook and simply read it. However, a textbook is written for a content or subject area, such as math, history, or English. Each content area has its own vocabulary. For example, a history textbook takes a different approach from that of a literature textbook.

Different courses may use the same words, but the words often take on a new or different meaning in the context of the content area.

The following sentences all use the word *parallel*. Write the letter of the course that would use the word in the context in which it appears.

1. The brain appears to be a *parallel* processor, in which many different groups of neuron circuits work on different tasks at the same time.

a. mathematics c. history

b. English d. psychology

2. Some writers use *parallel* structure of words and phrases for a balanced and smooth flow of ideas.

- a. mathematics c. history
 - b. English d. psychology
3. *Parallel* lines never intersect.

- a. mathematics c. history
- b. English d. psychology

Use context clues to determine your answers.

1. The word *parallel* in this sentence is used in the study of the mind. So this term is used in a psychology class (d).
2. The word *parallel* in this sentence is used in an English class (b).
3. The word *parallel* in this sentence is used in a mathematics class (a).

Textbook Definitions

You do not always need to use the dictionary to find the meaning of a word. In fact, many textbooks contain words or word groups that you cannot find in a dictionary. The content word is usually typed in **bold** or *italic* print. The definition follows, and many times an example is given. Context clues are helpful.

Read the following passage from a psychology textbook. Then answer the questions that follow it.

Disconfirmation is a communication pattern in which you ignore a person's presence as well as that person's communications. You say, in effect, that the person and what she or he has to say aren't worth serious attention. Disconfirming responses often lead to loss of self-esteem. Note that disconfirmation is not the same as rejection. In **rejection**, you disagree with the person; you indicate your unwillingness to accept something the other person says or does. In disconfirming someone, however, you deny that person's significance; you claim that what this person says or does simply does not count.

1. A communication pattern in which you ignore a person's presence as well as that person's communications is .
2. An unwillingness to accept something the other person says or does is

The author knows that these words, or the specific uses of these words, may be new for many students, so the words are set in **bold** print and definitions are given.

1. disconfirmation

2. rejection

PRACTICE

Read each of the following textbook passages. Then write the definition for each of the words in **bold** print.

1. To say that $x + 4 < 10$ (is less than) 10 and $x < 6$ (is less than) 6 are **equivalent** is to say that they have the same solution set. For example, the number 3 is a solution to $x + 4 < 10$. It is also a solution for $x < 6$. The number -2 is a solution

Glossary

Because each subject area has its own special vocabulary, many textbooks provide a special section called a glossary. A **glossary** is a list of words and their meanings. Sometimes the glossary is placed in the side margins on a textbook page; sometimes the glossary is a separate section in the back of the book. The

words in a glossary are placed in alphabetical order. They give the word, the spelling, and the meaning of the word or words only as they are used in that subject area or textbook.

Read the following sample glossary from an English composition handbook. In the spaces provided, write **T** if the statement is true or **F** if the statement is false.

EXAMPLE

Ad hominem attack: Attack on a person's character to win an argument or point. The term means "against the man" or "against the person."

Bandwagon appeal: An attempt to cause a person to assume a view or take action due to peer pressure.

False cause: An error in thinking that assumes one event causes another.

Hasty generalization: Drawing a conclusion about a population based on a sample that is not large enough.

Glossary of Fallacies

1. Jeremy made a **hasty generalization** when he gave credit to making a perfect score on his math test to the rabbit's foot he carried for good luck.

2. Elected public officials often face **ad hominem** attacks about their private lives during election campaigns.

3. Bill's decision to smoke cigarettes because his friends all smoke is an example that a **bandwagon appeal** may actually work.

4. The word **fallacies** suggests errors.

1. False; Jeremy committed a *false cause* error.

2. True

3. True

4. True

Vocabulary-Building Skills

A. Look over the following entry from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Then mark the numbered items **T** (true) or **F** (false), based on the entry.

EXPLANATION

My·o·pia \mi --'o --pe- - \ n [NL, fr. Gk *myo-pia*, fr. *myo-p-*, *myo-ps*] (ca. 1752)

1 : a condition in which the visual images come to a focus in front of the retina of the eye resulting esp. in defective vision of distant objects

2 : a lack of foresight or discernment: a narrow view of something – **my·o·pic**

\-'o --pik, -'ä-\ *adj* – **my·o·pi·cal·ly** \-pi-k()le-\ *adv* e

e

1. The entry gives three forms of the word *myopia*.

2. *Myopia* can be a way of thinking about a topic.

3. *Myopia* has three syllables.

4. The *y* in *myopia* sounds like the *y* in *yard*.

5. *Myopic* is a noun.

B. Look over the following list of words from the glossary of the college textbook

Access to Health. Based on the definition of each word and the context of each sentence, label each statement **T** if it is true or **F** if it is false.

REVIEW TEST 2 35

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Stress Mental and physical responses to change.

Stressor A physical, social, or psychological event or condition that requires adjustment.

Adjustment The attempt to cope with a given situation.

Strain The wear-and-tear sustained by the body and mind in adjusting to or resisting a stressor.

Glossary

6. **Stress** is usually the result of an internal state of emotional tension that occurs in response to the various demands of living.

7. An angry parent is an example of a **stressor**.

- 8. **Adjustments** are used as a last resort in response to stress.
- 9. **Strain** is always a physical problem.
- 10. Binge eating may be an unhealthy **adjustment** to the **stress** caused by low self-esteem.

Vocabulary-Building Skills

A. Look over the following entry from *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*.

Then mark each item **T** (true) or **F** (false), based on the entry.

myr·i·ad \ˈmir-ē- d\ n [Gk *myriad-*, *myrias*, fr. *myrioi* countless, ten thousand]

(1555) **1** : ten thousand **2** : a great number < a ~ of ideas >

2myriad *adj* (1791) **1** : INNUMERABLE < those ~ problems > **2** : having

innumerable aspects or elements < the ~ activity of the new land—Meridel

Le Sueur >

e

- 1. The noun *myriad* comes from a Greek word meaning “ten thousand.”
- 2. The word *myriad* can be used as a noun or as an adjective.

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- 3. The word *myriad* has four syllables.
- 4. The *i* in *myriad* sounds like the *i* in *sigh*.

B. Look over the following list of words from the glossary of an ecology textbook.

Based on the definition of each word and the context of each sentence, label each statement **T** if it is true or **F** if it is false.

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Alluvial A water-carved canyon

Arroyo Related to material deposited by running water

Playa A natural, low water basin

Topography The physical structure of the landscape

Glossary

- 5. The **topography** of a desert is made up of lush vegetation.
- 6. **Playas** can receive water that rushes down a hill.
- 7. After a violent storm, soil that has been shaped into **alluvial** fans stretch across the desert.

C. Look over the following list of words from the glossary of an English handbook.

Based on the definition of each word and the context of each sentence, label each statement **T** if it is true or **F** if it is false.

Annotation A brief note you write about a text while reading it by making marks such as underlining, circling, and highlighting. Notes can be words, phrases, questions, or statements.

Paraphrase A restatement in your own words of the author's ideas and structure. A paraphrase closely follows the original source, pulls in many details, and may be as long as the original text.

Summary A condensed version of a text in which you explain the author's meaning fairly and accurately in your own words. A summary focuses on the author's main idea and is shorter than the original text.

Lesson Plan for Class –VI (Non-Model Schools)

Lesson: Putting words in an alphabetic order

Level: VI

General Objectives

- (1) To sensitize students about the necessity of using reference materials
- (2) To acquaint students with the use of dictionary

Specific Objectives

- (1) To help the students understand the order of words in a dictionary
- (2) To help them arrange the words in proper sequence
- (3) To help them find out the meanings of words from the dictionary

Introduction

The teacher introduces a dictionary to the students by showing them a dictionary and elicits responses from them regarding its main uses. When necessary, he supplements with additional information. If the resources permit, he can divide the students into groups of five and give dictionaries to each of the groups. Then he asks them to look at one particular page and observe the sequence of words there. Or else he provides the photocopy of one of the pages in a dictionary to all the students before carrying out his activities. Then he gives them some words to and asks them to locate the words in that page. When the students are busy in locating the words, he goes on moving round the class and helps students who have difficulty in locating the words. When he feels that the students are comfortable in this exercise, he gives them an assignment to check their understanding. First of all, he gives them words from a

single page to make their job easier. Gradually he proceeds to the next stage and gives a more difficult assignment with words starting with different letters.

Work Sheet-I

Look at the page given to you(846-847,OALD) .Locate the words given below and write them in proper sequence as they appear in the dictionary. Also mark them with serial numbers.

nape

narrate

nation

narrow

nap

nasal

napkin

nasty

nanny

name

Work Sheet-II

Now look at the words from the lesson the “Cobbler and the Elves” from your book Gem’s English Reader-I.As you can see , all these words start with the letter’s’. Arrange them in proper sequence as they would appear in a dictionary.

Shoes

surprise

sold

stitch

sing

such

some

sit

Work Sheet-III

Once again, we have words from the lesson the “Cobbler and the Elves” from your book Gem’s English Reader-I. But these words don’t start with a single letter; they start with many different letters. Arrange them in proper sequence as they would appear in a dictionary. Find out the meanings of difficult words with the help of a dictionary.

Cobbler,

enter,

leather,

hungry,

wonderful,

pair,

look,

morning,

elves,

tonight,

dancing,

stitch,

pass,

worked,

finished,

thrilled,

clothes,

anymore

Home Assignment

Arrange the following words in the sequence as they would appear in a dictionary.

Bear,cattle,manage,wax,paper,naughty,umbrella,action,battle,donkey,peanut,utmost,
wander,ambulance,lock,meat,van,sample,vase,simple,dress,comb,neat,luck,ink,rabbit,
tortoise, ice-cream, rose, tumbler