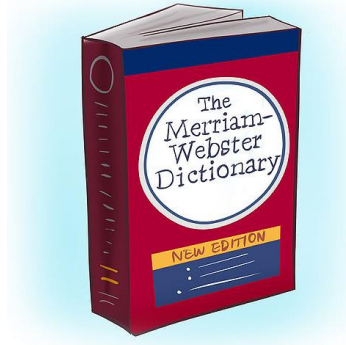


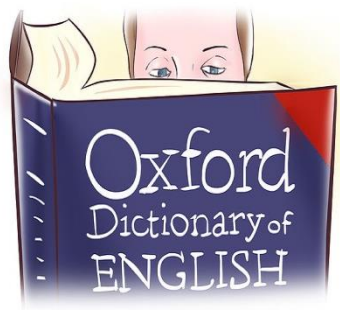
Using a Dictionary



Choose the right dictionary

It's also a good idea to upgrade your dictionary every now and then so that you have access to the latest new words that are added to the dictionary every year.^[2]

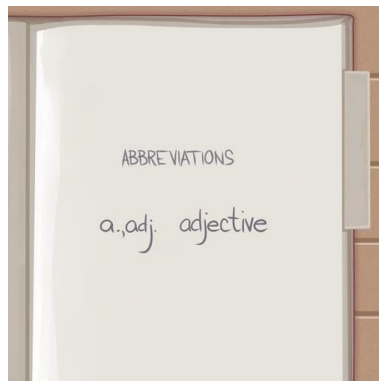
- Consider purchasing specialist dictionaries if they'd be useful in your study or career. Some examples of specialist dictionaries include language dictionaries, technical dictionaries, rhymes, crossword, subject dictionaries (for example, for math, chemistry, biology, horticulture, etc.), illustrated dictionaries (excellent for learning another language or for technical knowledge), slang and idioms, etc.
- Note that many countries have their own native dictionaries that might be more helpful than sourcing a dictionary from just anywhere, such as the Macquarie dictionary in Australia, Oxford dictionary in England, Webster's dictionary in the United States, etc.
- Some schools, universities and workplaces prefer the use of one particular dictionary. This is for reasons of maintaining a consistent style and understanding among everyone using them; make sure you use the right one for your assignments, editing, and reports.
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Read the introduction

The best way to learn how to use your particular dictionary effectively is to read its introductory section where you'll find out how the entries are arranged. The introductory section of your dictionary will explain important information such as the abbreviations and pronunciation symbols used throughout the entries.

- Introductions to dictionaries explain things like how entries are arranged (they typically give the word, and the variations of the word; whether part of speech the word is; pronunciation of the word; definition, etc.). Reading the introduction will give you a handle on how to find words and how to use the information that you do find.
- There may also be information on pronunciation of words with similar spellings; this can be helpful if you have only heard a word and you're not sure of its spelling. For example, if you hear "not", it might also be "knot" but the "k" is silent, and this list can help you with suggestions.



Learn the abbreviations

Dictionaries often have abbreviations in the definitions for a word. This can be confusing if you don't know what the abbreviations stand for. Typically a dictionary will have a list of abbreviations near the front of the book; either in the introduction, or after it.^[3]

- For example "adj." stands for "adjective" and will tell you what kind of word the word you're looking up is. "Adv." or "advb." can stand for "adverb; adverbially."
- Something like "n." can stand for at least three different things: the most obvious and common is "noun," but it can also stand for "neuter" or "north" depending on the context. So make sure that you check the context of the word when you're looking it up.



Learn the guide to pronunciation

If you immediately jump right into reading the dictionary without understanding the pronunciation guide, it can be difficult to figure it out. Having an idea about the symbols of pronunciation will make it a lot easier for you.^[4]

- The pronunciation of a word will be placed between two reversed virgules (\ \) and will typically be printed in italics.
- A single stress mark (') precedes the strongest syllable in a word. A double mark precedes the syllable with with a medium (or secondary stress) ("), and the third level of stress has no marker. For example: penmanship would look like this '\pen-m&n-"ship\.
- The symbol \&\ indicates an unstressed vowel. This symbol often intrudes between a stressed vowel and a following \r\ or \l\, such as in sour '\sau(-&)r\.
- The symbol \ä\ symbolizes the type of "a" sound that appears in words like "caught," or "fought." Compare this to the symbol \a\ which designates the sound "a" in "mat, map, snap," and so on. The word doesn't necessarily have to have the letter "a" to have a type of "a" sound.

Looking Up a Word



Find the section with the first letter of your word

Dictionaries follow alphabetical order. For example, "dog" begins with "d" which means that it will be in the section after "c" and before "e".

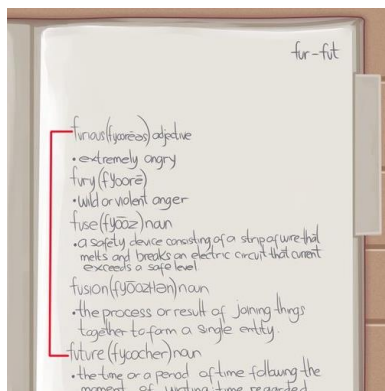
- Don't forget the possible spellings for trickier words, such as "gnome" begins with a "g", or "psychology" begins with a "p", or "knock" begins with a "k", etc.
- If you're not entirely sure what the first letter is, start with the letter it sounds like. If you can't find the word under that section, then try other sections. For example if you didn't know that "psychology" begins with a "p" you might start looking in the "s" section. When you couldn't find it there, you might try looking in the "p" section next because you can think along the lines of "psychic" and "psychosis."
- Also, keep in mind that certain words sound alike that are spelled very differently. For example, "throne" and "thrown" are spelled differently and mean very different things. So be careful that you end up with the correct word.



Read the guide words

These are the two words at the top of the page that tell you what types of words are on the page. These words will help you find the word you're looking for in the right letter section.^[5]

- For example if you're looking for the word "bramble" you would begin looking in the "B" section. You would look at the tops of the pages as you went through it until you came to the page with the guide words "braid bread." This tells you that all the words between braid and bread are on this page. Since "bramble" starts with "b-r-a" it will be in this section.
- As always, the dictionary goes in alphabetical order, so bramble (b-r-a) will come before bread (b-r-e).



Scan down the page for your word

If you were looking for the word "futile," for example, you would move past "furry" and "fuse" and "fuss". Since the example word begins with "f-u-t", go past all the "f-u-r" and all the "f-u-s" words

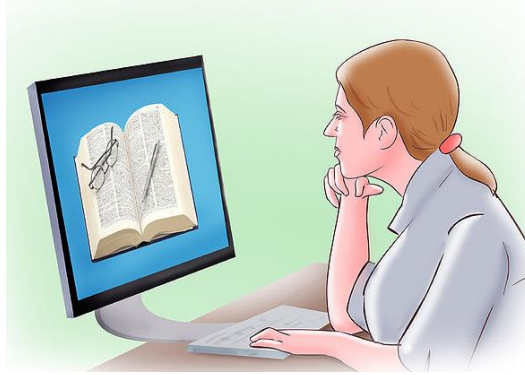
alphabetically until you reach the "f-u-t" area of the page. In this example, move right down through "fut" and "Futhark" and this is where you will find "futile."



Read the definition

Once you've located the word it will tell you exactly what it means (and if it has more than one meaning, it will tell you the most common one first), how to pronounce it, how to capitalize it (if it's a proper noun), what part of speech it is and so on.

- Quite a few people get daunted by the definitions themselves, because they can involve words that you have to then look up. Don't feel discouraged. See if you can figure out the meaning from the example sentences provided and if not, look up the words you aren't sure of.
- Dictionaries can also sometimes give the synonyms (words that mean the same thing as your word) and the antonyms of a word (words that mean the opposite of your word). So, for example, if your word is futile some synonyms might be "fruitless" or "unsuccessful" and some antonyms might be "effective" or "helpful." You can also find near neighbor words such as "futility".
- You might also find an etymology, derivation, or history of the word. Even if you don't know Latin or Ancient Greek, you may find that this information helps you to remember or understand the word.
- Dictionaries also often provide spellings in other English derivations (US English, British English, Australian English, etc.).

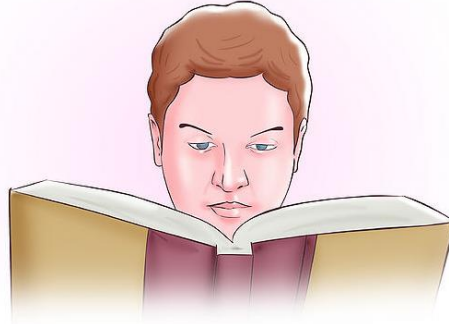


Alternatively, use an online dictionary

Online dictionaries are easy. Choose a suitable free online dictionary, or a subscription one if your place of work or study subscribes. Type in the word you're looking for. The search engine will return the word to you and the definition section should contain most of the elements discussed above.

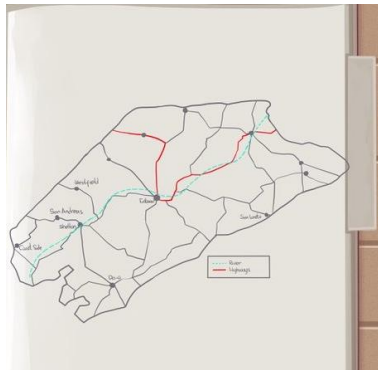
- Make use of the audio content provided with online dictionaries. This can help considerably when you're unsure how to pronounce the word.
- To use Google to find online definitions, type: "define: futile". The search engine will only look for definitions.
- Note that free services may not be as comprehensive as a subscription or book dictionary, so keep this in mind when you're not sure that you've found the right answer.

Using Your Dictionary Further



Use the dictionary to find standard letter forms.

Hard copy dictionaries (rather than online ones) often have standard letters for jobs, for RSVPs, for filing complaints, for various official writings.



Research various facts.

Dictionaries often have more than just words and their definitions. Some of them have lots of information about the world, usually in the form of various lists. These include geographical information (like maps, countries, cities, capitals, etc.)

- Hard copy dictionaries often have different weights and volumes, as well as conversion tables. This can come in handy if you need to convert pounds to kilograms or vice versa.

- You can also usually find statistics on population in various cities and countries, as well as lists of the flags of different countries, states, provinces, and regions around the world.
- Many dictionaries also have lists of famous or historical people, which you can peruse.



Have fun!

Simply browse a dictionary to enlighten yourself about new words now and then. Open the dictionary up to any page and scan the page for words that are unfamiliar or seem interesting. Pinpoint them, read the definition and try to add the new word to your thinking or talking during the next few days until it becomes a remembered part of your natural vocabulary.

- Play the dictionary game with friends. This consists of getting some friends together and a dictionary. The first player looks up a challenging word and uses it in a sentence. The other players have to guess if the use of the word is accurate or an outright fabrication. If a player guesses correctly, it's their turn next.
- Another dictionary game: Each player chooses a word which should be familiar to the other players, then reads out the dictionary definition. The other players compete to guess the word as quickly as possible - perhaps even shouting out while the definition is still being read.
- Play Balderdash with a foreign language dictionary. Pick a random obscure word and then have people make up definitions along with having the real definition, having people guess which definition is the "real" one.