

The background of the cover is an abstract, blurred composition of colors. The top half is dominated by a deep blue, which transitions into a lighter, more vibrant blue in the middle. The bottom portion of the cover features a horizontal band of bright green and a bottom-most section of bright red. The overall effect is a soft, painterly gradient.

Oxford Dictionary of Current English

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Oxford Dictionary of Current English

FOURTH EDITION

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and Julia Elliott

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Preface

This new edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* has been fully revised, updated, and redesigned. It provides up-to-date and accessible information on the core vocabulary of today's English in a single pocket-sized volume, focusing on clear explanations of meaning and help with aspects of words which often cause difficulties, especially spelling, pronunciation, grammar, and usage. It will be particularly useful for secondary-school students in the 14–16 age range.

Part of the range based on the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (11th edition), the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* is based on the evidence of how the language is actually used today, drawing on the analysis of hundreds of millions of words of real English contained in the Oxford English Corpus. Information in the dictionary is presented in a clear and concise way; definitions focus on the central meanings of words and are easier to understand than ever before, avoiding the use of difficult and technical terms. The new design and an open layout, with each new section of an entry (phrases, derivatives, usage notes, spelling notes, and etymologies) on a new line, ensure that finding individual sections and entries is easy to do.

In addition to giving clear information on the core language of current English, this new edition of the dictionary provides more help than ever before with tricky questions of grammar and usage (for example, on the difference between *pore* and *pour* and whether you should say *between you and me* or *between you and I*). The dictionary also includes a new feature: extra notes on words that people often find difficult to spell, such as *weird*, *skilful*, and *exaggerate*. Usage and spelling notes are based on evidence of real mistakes or problems that people have in their use of the language.

Pronunciations are given using a simple respelling system, making them very easy to understand: for the new edition, there is extra help with pronunciations of less straightforward

or unfamiliar words, such as *anomalous*, *subtle*, and *unequivocal*. Etymologies (word origins) are written in a non-technical style to highlight the main words from which English words originate, with language names written out in full.

Guide to the use of the dictionary

1. STRUCTURE OF ENTRIES

The *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* is designed to be as easy to use as possible. Here is an explanation of the main types of information that you will find in the dictionary.

Headword	<p>bathe /bayth/ • v. (bathes, bathing, bathed) 1 wash by immersing the body in water. 2 Brit. take a swim. 3 soak or wipe gently with liquid to clean or soothe. • n.: Brit. a swim.</p> <p>– DERIVATIVES bather n.</p> <p>– ORIGIN Old English.</p>	Verb forms (inflections)
		Regional label (showing where word is used)
Sense number	<p>apogee /ap-uh-jee/ • n. 1 the highest point: <i>his creative activity reached its apogee in 1910</i>; 2 the point in the orbit of the moon or a satellite at which it is furthest from the earth.</p> <p>– ORIGIN from Greek <i>apogaion diastēma</i>, 'distance away from earth'.</p>	• Introduces new part of speech or word class
Part of speech or word class	<p>buck¹ • n. 1 the male of some animals, e.g. deer and rabbits. 2 a vertical jump performed by a horse. 3^{old use}: a fashionable young man. • v. 1 (of a horse) perform a buck. 2 go against: <i>the shares bucked the market trend</i>. 3 (buck up or buck someone up) informal become or make someone more cheerful.</p> <p>– ORIGIN Old English.</p>	Usage label (showing how word is used)
Example of use (taken from real evidence)		Typical pattern (in bold)
Homonym number (shows different word with the same spelling)	<p>buck² • n. N. Amer. & Austral./NZ informal a dollar.</p>	

- centralize** (or **centralise**)
 • v. (**centralizes, centralizing, centralized**) bring under the control of a central authority.
 – DERIVATIVES **centralism** n., **centralist** n. & adj., **centralization** n.
- Derivatives
(in alphabetical order)
- Alternative spelling of headword
- him** • pron. (third person sing.) used as the object of a verb or preposition to refer to a male person or animal previously mentioned.
 – ORIGIN Old English.
- Grammatical information (in round brackets)
- die** • n. **1** sing. of **DICE**. **2** (pl. **dies**) a device for cutting or moulding metal or for stamping a design on to coins or medals.
 – PHRASES **the die is cast** an event has happened that cannot be changed.
 – ORIGIN Old French *de*.
- Cross reference to another word in the dictionary (in bold small capitals)
 Phrases and expressions
- Plural form
- broccoli** /brok-kuh-li/ • n. a vegetable with heads of small green or purplish flower buds.
 – ORIGIN Italian.
- Spelling note
- ☑ Spell **broccoli** with a double c and one l.
- defuse** /dee-fyooz/ • v. (**defuses, defusing, defused**) **1** make a situation less tense or dangerous. **2** remove the fuse from an explosive device in order to prevent it from exploding.
- Pronunciation (for selected words)
- Usage note
- USAGE:** Do not confuse **defuse** and **diffuse**. **Defuse** means 'make a situation less tense or dangerous', while **diffuse** means 'spread over a wide area' (*technologies diffuse rapidly*).
- grizzly** • n. (also **grizzly bear**) (pl. **grizzlies**) a large variety of American brown bear often having white-tipped fur.
 – ORIGIN from **GRIZZLED**.
- Word origin (etymology)
- USAGE:** On the confusion of **grizzly** and **grisly**, see the note at **GRISLY**.

2. HEADWORD AND ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS

The headword is the first word in each entry (separate section of the dictionary that deals with a particular word) and is printed in thick dark type (e.g. **score**). Although there is only one way that most words can be spelled, sometimes you can use other spellings (called *variants*) which are also acceptable. Such spellings are given after the headword, e.g. **adaptor** (also **adapter**), or before a particular sense if the alternative spelling only applies to that sense. In all such cases the spelling given as the headword is the one that most people use. The label *US* shows spellings that are used in American English, e.g. **colour** (*US color*).

Where verbs can be spelled with either an **-ize** or **-ise** ending, the two spellings are given in the following way: **apologize** (or **apologise**), to show that you can use either spelling. The spelling **-ise** is far more common in British English, while **-ize** is found in American writing and in English in other parts of the world, although it is used in British English as well.

Words that are different in meaning but spelled the same way (called *homographs*) are given small numbers to distinguish them (e.g. **buck**¹, meaning 'the male of an animal such as a deer' and **buck**², meaning 'a dollar').

3. FORMS OF NOUNS AND VERBS

Plurals of nouns

You can form the plurals of most nouns by adding **-s**, or **-es** when they end in **-s**, **-x**, **-z**, **-sh**, or **-ch** (as in *church*). These kinds of plurals are not shown in the dictionary.

All other plural forms are spelled out in full, for example:

- nouns ending in **-i** or **-o**, e.g. **alibi** → **alibis**, **albino** → **albinos**
- nouns ending in **-a**, **-um**, or **-us** which are or appear to be Latin forms, e.g. **spectrum** → **spectra**, **larva** → **larvae**
- nouns ending in **-y**, e.g. **fly** → **flies**
- nouns with more than one plural, e.g. **storey** → **storeys** or **stories**
- nouns with a plural that changes markedly from the singular form, e.g. **foot** → **feet**

- nouns with a plural that has the same form as the singular, e.g. **sheep** → **sheep**

Verbs

Most verbs change their form (inflect) by adding *-s*, *-ing*, and *-ed* to the infinitive (e.g. **jump** → **jumps**, **jumping**, **jumped**). These kinds of verb forms are not shown in the dictionary.

Other verbs change their forms in the ways set out below and are shown in full:

- verbs whose infinitive (basic unchanged part) ends in *-e*, e.g. **change** → **changes**, **changing**, **changed**
- verbs which change by doubling a final consonant, e.g. **bat** → **bats**, **batting**, **batted**
- verbs ending in *-y* which change the *-y* to *-i*, e.g. **try** → **tries**, **trying**, **tried**
- verbs in which the past tense and/or the past participle do not follow the regular *-ed* pattern, e.g. **feel** → **feels**, **feeling**, **felt**; **wake** → **wakes**, **waking**, **woke**; past part. **woken**
- verbs ending in *-er*, showing whether the final *-r* is doubled or not, e.g. **confer** → **confers**, **conferring**, **conferred**; **shiver** → **shivers**, **shivering**, **shivered**

Adjectives

Adjectives have three different forms that express the level or intensity of a particular quality. The basic level is called the *positive*, e.g. **sweet**; the level expressing more of a quality is called the *comparative*, e.g. **sweeter**; and the level expressing most of a quality is called the *superlative*, e.g. **sweetest**. Most adjectives form their comparatives and superlatives in the following regular ways, and these are not shown in the dictionary:

- words of one syllable adding *-er* and *-est*, e.g. **great** → **greater**, **greatest**
- words of one syllable ending in silent (unspoken) *-e*, which drop the *-e* and add *-er* and *-est*, e.g. **brave** → **braver**, **bravest**
- words which form the comparative and superlative by adding 'more' and 'most'

In all other cases the forms are shown in the dictionary:

- adjectives which form the comparative and superlative by

doubling a final consonant, e.g. **hot** → **hotter**, **hottest**

- two-syllable adjectives which form the comparative and superlative with *-er* and *-est*, e.g. **happy** → **happier**, **happiest**

4. HYPHENATION

Although standard spelling in English is fixed, the use of hyphens is not. There are a few general rules that you should follow, and these are outlined below.

Noun compounds: there are no set rules as to whether you should write a compound (a word such as **airstream**) as one word, two words, or with a hyphen (unless the hyphen is used to show the word's grammatical function: see the next section): **airstream**, **air stream**, and **air-stream** are all acceptable.

However, in modern English, people are tending to use hyphens less than before, and are writing compounds either as one word (**airstream**) or two words (**air raid**) rather than with a hyphen. While you will find one-word and two-word compounds in both British and American English, there is a general preference to write compounds as two words in British English and as one word in American English.

To save space and avoid confusion, we give only one of the three possible forms—the standard British one—in the dictionary. This does not, however, mean that other forms are incorrect or not used.

Grammatical information: hyphens are also used to show a word's grammatical function. When a noun compound which is made up of two separate words (e.g. **credit card**) is placed before another noun, the rule is that you should write the compound with a hyphen, so that you would write for example *I used my credit card* but *credit-card debt*. You will see this in example sentences in the dictionary but it is not otherwise mentioned in the dictionary entries.

There is a similar rule with compound adjectives such as **well known**. When you place them after the verb (in the *predicative* position) you should not write such adjectives with a hyphen, but when you put them before the noun (in the *attributive* position) you should use a hyphen: *he is well known* but *a well-known painter*.

The rule with verb compounds is that, where a noun compound is two words (e.g. **hero worship**) you should normally write any verb compound formed from it with a hyphen (to **hero-worship**). Compound verb forms of this type are always shown in the dictionary entries.

5. LABELS

The majority of the words and senses in this dictionary are all part of standard English, which means that they are the kinds of words we use in every type of situation, whether at home, with friends, or in a formal work situation. Some words, however, are suitable only for certain situations or are found only in certain types of writing, and where this is the case a label (or a combination of labels) is used.

Register labels

Register labels refer to the particular level of use in the language—indicating whether a term is informal, formal, historical, and so on.

formal: normally used only in writing, such as in official documents (e.g. **abode**)

informal: normally used only in speaking or writing to friends (e.g. **telly**)

dated: no longer used by most English speakers, but still used by older people or to give a humorous or other effect (e.g. **charwoman**)

old use: old-fashioned language, not in ordinary use today, though sometimes used to give an old-fashioned or humorous effect and also found in the literature of the past (e.g. **damsel**)

hist.: historical—only used today to refer to something that is no longer part of modern life (e.g. **blunderbuss**)

literary: found only or mainly in literature (e.g. **foe**)

tech.: technical—normally used only in technical language, though not restricted to a particular subject field (e.g. **dorsal**)

humorous: used to sound funny or playful (e.g. **tome**)

euphem.: euphemistic—used instead of a more direct or rude term (e.g. **powder room** instead of ‘women’s toilet’)

dialect: only used in certain local regions of the English-speaking world (e.g. **bide**)

derog.: derogatory—deliberately intended to express a low opinion or insult someone else (e.g. **bimbo**)

offens.: offensive—likely to cause offence, especially racial offence, whether the person using it means to or not

Geographical labels

English is spoken throughout the world, and, while most of the words used in British English will be the same as those used in American or Australian English, there are some words which are only found in one type of English. For example, the normal word in American English for a pavement is **sidewalk**, while the normal word in Australian English for a large sheep or cattle farm is **station**. These kinds of words are given a geographical label.

The main regional types of English are British, US and Canadian, Australian and New Zealand, South African, Indian, and West Indian. Most of the words and senses in the dictionary are found in all these types of English, but where important local differences exist these are shown. The geographical label *Brit.* means that the word is found typically in British English but is not found in American English, though it may be found in other varieties such as Australian English. The label *US*, on the other hand, means that the word is typically US and is not standard in British English, though it may be found elsewhere.

Subject labels

These are used to show that a word or sense is associated with a particular subject field or specialist activity, such as Music, Chemistry, or Football.

6. DEFINITIONS

Many words have only one meaning or definition, for example **bookcase** or **fearless**. Other words, such as **catch** or **fall**, have several meanings. In these types of entries the definitions are separated by numbers and listed with the most common and important senses first.

7. DERIVATIVES

Derivatives are words formed from another word with the addition of a suffix (ending): for example, **adjustable** is an adjective which is a derivative of the verb **adjust**, with the suffix **-able** added to it. Many derivatives do not need a definition because you can understand the meaning from the sense of the main word and the particular ending used; in such cases, you will find the derivatives listed alphabetically at the end of the entry for the main word (e.g. **eagerly** is at the end of the entry for **eager**). When a derivative has more than one meaning and needs to be explained in more detail, then it is given an entry in its own right (e.g. **agreeable**).

8. ETYMOLOGIES

Etymologies (word origins) are provided for many words: they explain the language that the word comes from and the meaning of that word if it is different from the meaning of the English word in the dictionary entry (e.g. **campaign** is from the French word *campagne*, which means 'open country'). You will find that some words in the dictionary do not have etymologies. These include the following: compounds, which are formed from two other words (e.g. **blue whale**, **half-hearted**, or **doorman**); words which are derivatives of other words or are clearly related in some other way (e.g. **fantastic** does not have an etymology but **fantasy** does); words whose origins are unknown or uncertain; words that derive from imitating a sound (e.g. **baa**, **hiss**).

9. SPELLING AND USAGE NOTES

The dictionary's usage notes give clear information about points of grammar (e.g. how to use **fewer** and **less** correctly), usage (e.g. whether it is best to say **fireman** or **firefighter**), and the differences between words which people often confuse with each other (e.g. **stationary** and **stationery**).

The spelling notes are shown by a tick enclosed in a box and give clear advice on words that are tricky to spell, such as **cemetery**, **February**, and **receive**.

10. PRONUNCIATIONS

The *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* uses a respelling system for pronunciations which is very easy to understand and to use. The dictionary gives a pronunciation for any word which native English speakers might find difficult; it does not provide pronunciations for everyday words that everyone knows how to say, such as *table* or *large*. Foreign pronunciations are always shown in the way an English speaker would say them, e.g. /kor-don **bler**/ (cordon bleu).

Pronunciations are divided into syllables by means of hyphens. The main stress is shown in thick dark type, e.g. /**ab**-duh-muhn/ (abdomen).

An apostrophe is used instead of the sound /uh/ in cases where there is a slight break between sounds, as in /**foh**-k'l/ (focal), or where the sound is a consonant that forms a whole syllable, as in /**har**-k'n/ (hearken).

The sound of the word 'eye' is shown in two ways: it is shown as /I/ in the first parts of words and in parts where it stands alone, as in /**I**-ther/ (either) or /kat-I-uhn/ (cation), but as /y/ in all other cases, as in /a-li-by/ (alibi).

A rhyming pronunciation is given where the alternative respelling would involve odd-looking word groups, as in aisle /rhymes with mile/.

List of respelling symbols

VOWELS	EXAMPLES	CONSONANTS	EXAMPLES
a	as in cat	b	as in bat
ah	as in calm	ch	as in chin
air	as in hair	d	as in day
ar	as in bar	f	as in fat
aw	as in law	g	as in get
ay	as in say	h	as in hat
e	as in bed	j	as in jam
ee	as in meet	k	as in king
eer	as in beer	kh	as in loch
er	as in her	l	as in leg
ew	as in few	m	as in man
i	as in pin	n	as in not
l	as in eye	ng	as in sing, finger
o	as in top	nk	as in thank
oh	as in most	p	as in pen
oi	as in join	r	as in red
oo	as in soon	s	as in sit
oor	as in poor	sh	as in shop
or	as in corn	t	as in top
ow	as in cow	th	as in thin
oy	as in boy	th	as in this
u	as in cup	v	as in van
uh	as in the 'a' in along	w	as in will
uu	as in book	y	as in yes
y	as in cry	z	as in zebra
yoo	as in unit	zh	as in vision
yoor	as in Europe		
yr	as in fire		

11. ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE DICTIONARY

abbrev.	abbreviation	Med.	Medicine
adj.	adjective	Meteorol.	Meteorology
adv.	adverb	Mil.	Military
Anat.	Anatomy	n.	noun
Amer. Football	American Football	N. Amer.	North American
Archit.	Architecture	Naut.	Nautical
Astron.	Astronomy	N. English	Northern English
Austral.	Australian	NZ	New Zealand
Biochem.	Biochemistry	opp.	opposite of
Biol.	Biology	offens.	offensive
Bot.	Botany	part.	participle
Chem.	Chemistry	Philos.	Philosophy
comb. form	combining form	Phonet.	Phonetics
contr.	contraction	Physiol.	Physiology
derog.	derogatory	pl.	plural
det.	determiner	prep.	preposition
Electron.	Electronics	pres.	present
Engl. Law	English Law	pronunc.	pronunciation
esp.	especially	Rom. Myth.	Roman Mythology
euphem.	euphemistic	S. Afr.	South African
exclam.	exclamation	sing.	singular
fem.	feminine	Stat.	Statistics
Geol.	Geology	symp.	symbol
Geom.	Geometry	tech.	technical
Gk Myth.	Greek Mythology	usu.	usually
hist.	historical	v.	verb
Ind.	Indian	var.	variant
Math.	Mathematics	Zool.	Zoology

NOTE ON TRADEMARKS AND PROPRIETARY STATUS

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