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DICTIONARY**

COLLINS Birmingham University International Language Database

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Foreword

The Project Team

The final project team is set out above. Several other colleagues made a notable contribution in the early years, and continued to provide support throughout the life of the project. Antoinette Renouf, the original Project Co-ordinator led the team from 1980-83 and established the text corpus and maintained and developed corpus work. Dr Michael Hoey gave a great deal of help in administration and policy guidance in the early period and continued with strong academic guidance. From Collins, Beryl T Atkins played a formative role in the design of the project and in the general training; continuing in her capacity as General Editor she commented on draft dictionary texts throughout.

Some members of the team moved on before the work was completed. Wendy Morris and Clive Upton were two of the original editors. Nigel Turton, Martin Manser, Dieter Wachendorff, Judy Amanthis, Duncan Marshall, Emily Driver and Michael Rundell were compilers for substantial periods. Ian Sedwell helped with the computing. Heather Champion, Lorraine Dove, Cheryl Evans and Sue Smith were secretaries.

The project has also benefitted greatly from people who, while not regular members of the team, acted in a consultative capacity or provided a specialist service. In particular Marcel Lemmens, grammar consultant, must be mentioned, and Cathy Emmott who helped with the Extra Column.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank many other people whose names do not appear on the team credits but who made a significant contribution to the compilation of the dictionary.

This project was part of the work of the English Department and its successful completion owes much to

the support of the Head of the Department throughout, Professor J T Boulton. In various ways every one of the staff helped and encouraged the work and one or two must be singled out for specific contributions. Dr David Brazil devised the system of recording pronunciations, and transcribed most of them. Tim Lane ensured their transfer to electronic form and gave support on the computational side. Tim Johns encouraged the use of real examples and made experimental classes available. Chris Kennedy, Tony Dudley-Evans, Dr Mike McCarthy, Charles Owen, Phillip King and Martin Hewings all read drafts, picked holes in them and offered many suggestions for improvement.

Many colleagues in the University of Birmingham contributed notably to the project. Three Pro-Vice Chancellors in turn guided the project through various committees; Professor Harry Prime, Professor John Fage and Professor John Samuels. The Centre for Computing and Computer Sciences was deeply involved throughout and eased problems in the complex final editing.

I would also like to thank the past and present members of Collins staff who have helped in the project.

This dictionary is based on evidence and the evidence comes from hundreds of documents and conversations, kindly made available by the copyright holders. A full list is provided on page xxii.

Such a fundamental re-appraisal of a language requires a high degree of teamwork and large-scale co-ordination of resources. The success of this book and other books to come will owe a great deal to the people and groups mentioned above, and I am very grateful to them for their contributions.

John M Sinclair
Professor of Modern English Language
Editor in Chief

Guide to the Use of the Dictionary

This dictionary is written in ordinary, everyday English. There are only a few special symbols to understand and they are explained below. We also explain how to find things in a long entry. As far as possible each entry follows the same pattern. For instance, if you are looking for a note on the spelling, you will always find it near the beginning of the entry, but if you think you want to know about a phrase you should look near the end of the entry.

In the section that follows, on page xv, there is a short explanation of how this dictionary was designed and made, why it is new and different, and how you can make the best use of it.

The explanations given here refer only to the main text of the dictionary. By the side of the main text you will find an extra column of notes about the structures and meanings. To save space these notes are abbreviated and there is a key to the abbreviations on page xiii.

1 Entries

1.1 An entry in this dictionary is introduced by a word or group of words in large bold letters starting at the left-most side of the column.

agriculture ... is the practice of farming and the methods that are used to raise and look after crops and animals.

1.2 The main factor in deciding whether or not to include a word as an entry in this dictionary was how often it occurred in our large corpus of texts. However, some words were left out, for example very technical words, the names of countries, cities and people, and some rare foreign words.

2 Order of Entries

2.1 All entries are given in strict alphabetical order, taking no notice of capital letters, hyphens, apostrophes or spaces between words.

aid
aide
aide-de-camp
AIDS
ail
aileron
ailing
ailment
aim
aimless
ain't
air
air base
airbed

2.2 Sometimes a word can be used either alone or followed by another word, and the addition of the extra word does not change the meaning. If there are no other entries between them in alphabetical order, the word and the combination are explained in the same entry.

wellington ... **Wellingtons** or **wellington boots** are long rubber boots which you wear to keep your feet dry.

2.3 All the uses of a word are usually given together within the same entry. However, sometimes the same letters can form both a word and an abbreviation (no and No.), a set of

initials called an acronym (salt and SALT), or a contracted form (shed and she'd). In these cases the word is explained first in all its uses and the abbreviations, acronyms and contractions are explained in separate entries immediately afterwards.

am
Am.
a.m.
amalgam

2.4 Special entries, each in a box □, also appear at their correct place in alphabetical order. Some of these explain how to read the extra column. Others show the ways in which you can express some important concepts such as age, measurement, number and time in English. For the full list of these special entries, see page xiii.

3 Pronunciation

3.1 The pronunciation is normally given only for the first form of the word at each entry and is placed immediately after that form.

cabin /kæbɪn/, **cabins** ...

3.2 However, if the word is pronounced in different ways, for example when it is used as a noun and when it is used as a verb, these variations are explained after all the forms.

record, records, recording, recorded.

The verb is pronounced /rɪ'kɔ:d/ and the noun is pronounced /rɛkɔ:d/.

3.3 Pronunciation is not given for the special entries in boxes, for abbreviations that are rarely used in spoken English, or for entries that consist of two or more words whose pronunciation is given at each of the separate words.

3.4 The system used for pronunciation is described on page xii.

4 Forms and Spellings

4.1 The spelling for each form of a word in the dictionary is given in large bold letters at the beginning of each entry.

4.2 The following forms are usually given, if they are commonly used:

4.2.1 - for nouns, the plural form.

aerosol ... **aerosols** ...
bathing cap, bathing caps ...

4.2.2 - for qualitative adjectives, the comparative and superlative forms.

happy ... **happier, happiest** ...

Where no comparative or superlative forms are given for qualitative adjectives they are formed with 'more' and 'most'.

4.2.3 - for verbs, the third person form of the present tense (the -s form), the present participle (the -ing form), the past tense (the -ed form), and the past participle if it is not the same as the past tense.

place ... **places, placing, placed** ...

take ... **takes, taking, took, taken** ...

Guide to the Use of the Dictionary

4.3 If a word can be used as a noun with a plural and as a verb, and the third person form of the present tense of the verb is the same as the plural form of the noun, the -s form is only given once.

alarm ... alarms, alarming, alarmed ...

4.4 If there are any special features about the use of the forms, for example if a particular form or set of forms is used only when a word is used with one particular meaning, these features are explained after the forms.

hang ... The forms **hang, hangs, hanging, hung** are used for the verb except in paragraph 6 where the forms are **hang, hangs, hanging, hanged...**

4.5 One of the forms of a word may also be explained in a separate entry if the form is very common or has a different meaning in some of its uses.

begin ... begins, beginning, began, begun. 1. If you **begin** to do ...

beginning ... beginnings. 1 The **beginning** of an event ...

5 Entry notes

5.1 Entry notes may be given after the first form, after the pronunciation, or after all the forms.

5.2 An entry note may show different spellings of the word.

polarize ... polarizes, polarizing, polarized; also spelled **polarise ...**

vapour ... vapours; also spelled **vapor** in American English ...

baby-sitter, baby-sitters; also spelled without a hyphen ...

5.3 An entry note may explain changes in pronunciation.

default /diːfɔːlt/, **defaults, defaulting, defaulted.** The word **default** is also pronounced /diːfɔːlt/ in paragraph 3.

5.4 An entry note may explain the particular form or forms used for a particular meaning of the words or when the word is used in American or British English.

burst ... bursts, bursting. The form **burst** is used in the present tense and is the past tense and past participle of the verb ...

anaesthesia ...; also spelled **anesthesia,** especially in American English.

analogue ... analogues; also spelled **analog,** especially for paragraph 3.

5.5 An entry note may refer to all the uses of a word.

assemblage ... assemblages; a formal word. 1 An **assemblage** is ... 2 **Assemblage** is ...

6 Explanations of meaning and use

6.1 The entry word is always explained by means of a complete sentence. This normally means that the user of the dictionary is shown the word in natural English.

appoint ... 1 If you **appoint** someone to a particular post or to do a particular job, you formally choose them for it or ask them to do it.

becalmed ... If a sailing ship is **becalmed,** it is unable to move because there is no wind.

brave ... 1 Someone who is **brave** shows in their behaviour that they have the courage to do something even though it is frightening, dangerous or difficult.

6.2 In the explanation, the entry word is printed in bold letters. This is done if it is the first word of the explanation or if it appears later on.

acumen ... is the ability to make good judgements and decisions in relation to a particular activity, especially business.

bareback ... If you ride **bareback** you ride a horse without a saddle.

6.3 A note about the way in which a word is used may be found after the explanation.

auspicious ... Something that is **auspicious** gives hope of success or evidence that success is likely; a fairly formal word.

6.4 If a word has several senses as a noun, verb, etc, in a particular pattern of use, the first part of the explanation is not repeated.

cistern ... 1 A **cistern** is 1 a container which holds the water that is used to flush a toilet ... 2 a large tank in the roof of a house in which water is stored.

nod ... 1 If you **nod,** 1.1 you move your head quickly up and down several times to show that you are answering 'yes' to a question, or to show agreement, understanding, or approval ... 1.2 you bend your head once to indicate something or to give someone a signal to do something ... 1.3 you bend your head once when you meet or leave someone or when they leave you, as a way of saying hello or goodbye ... 1.4 you keep letting your head fall forward because you are falling asleep while sitting down ...

7 Ordering within an entry: paragraphs and sub-paragraphs:

7.1 If a word has only one common use, it is explained, sometimes with examples, within one paragraph and no numbers are used.

ostrich ... An **ostrich** is a large African bird that cannot fly. It has long legs, a long neck, a small head and large soft feathers.

7.2 If a word has several uses, the ordering within the entry has been decided by consideration of several criteria, including frequency, independence of meaning, and concreteness. For a fuller discussion of this point, see page xix.

7.3 If a word has several uses, but all the uses are as a noun, verb, etc, in a particular pattern, they are explained in one paragraph and each use is introduced by a whole number.

applause ... **Applause** is 1 an expression of enjoyment or appreciation by a group of people in which they all clap their hands ... 2 support or praise by a lot of people for something that has been done ...

7.4 If the uses of the word as a noun, or as a verb, etc, are very different from each other, each use may be given in a separate paragraph introduced by a whole number. These differences may be due to the following changes.

Guide to the Use of the Dictionary

7.4.1 - changes in meaning:

clear ... 16 If your skin is **clear**, it is free from spots and rashes and looks healthy ...
17 If your conscience is **clear**, you do not feel guilty about anything ...

18 If you, your time, or your diary is **clear**, no appointments or arrangements have been made ...

join ... 2 If you **join** a queue, you go to stand at the end of it so that you are part of it ...

3 If you **join** a club, society or organization, you become a member of it or start work as an employee of it ...

7.4.2 - changes in grammar:

affront ... 1 If something is an **affront** to someone, it is a deliberate insult or challenge to their pride or dignity ...

2 If you are **affronted** by something, you feel insulted and your pride and dignity are hurt ...

7.5 Sub-paragraphs, introduced by numbers with a decimal point, may be used when there are more than two senses of a particular pattern.

dryer ... also spelled **drier**. 1 A **dryer** is 1.1 a machine for drying clothes. 1.2 a hairdryer.

2 **Dryer** and **drier** are the comparative forms of **dry**.

appointment ... 1 The **appointment** of someone to do a particular job is the act or process of choosing them to do it.

2 An **appointment** is 2.1 a job or position usually involving some responsibility ... 2.2 someone who has been chosen for a particular job or position ...

8 Examples

8.1 An example in this dictionary is a group of words that appear in italics within an entry. The examples have been selected to show typical contexts, collocations and grammatical structures. For a fuller discussion of the role of examples see page xv.

8.2 The first example in each entry, or in each paragraph or sub-paragraph, is always preceded by the letters EG in small capital letters.

waterhole ... A **waterhole** is a pond or pool in the desert or other dry area where animals and people can find water to drink.
EG *We camped that evening by a waterhole.*

8.3 The examples will not always consist of complete sentences. When this is the case, they are introduced by three dots.

webbing ... is strong material which is woven in strips and used to make belts or straps, or used in seats to support the springs. EG *...A belt of green webbing...
...canvas webbing.*

8.4 Three dots are placed after an example to separate it from an example that follows.

8.5 Most of the examples in this dictionary are given exactly as they are found in our corpus, or with very minor changes which have been made in order to remove unnecessary distracting information.

9 The use of ►

9.1 The symbol ► is used in this dictionary to introduce a slight change in the way a word is used. The particular change involved is explained immediately after the symbol.

9.2 It can introduce a slight change in meaning. For example, an adjective that usually describes people may also be used to describe their behaviour, or a noun that refers to a container may also refer to its contents.

bucket ... 1 A **bucket** is a container shaped like a cylinder and which has an open top and a handle. Buckets are often used for holding and carrying water. EG *The hotel cleaner entered carrying a bucket and a mop.* ► **Bucket** is also used to refer to the amount of liquid which a bucket contains. EG *... a bucket of warm water.*

9.3 It can introduce a change in the grammar of the word that has little or no effect on its meaning. For example, a word that is most commonly used as a verb may also be used as a noun referring to the action that the verb involves.

giggle ... If you **giggle**, you make soft and repeated laughing noises, especially because you are nervous or embarrassed. EG *The absurd sound made her giggle...* 'Oh dear,' she giggled. 'I'd quite forgotten'... *giggling helplessly at her own joke.* ► used as a noun. EG *...with a nervous giggle... We had a good giggle about that... ...stifling a giggle.*

9.4 The change may involve a count noun that can also be used as an uncount noun.

rope ... 1 A **rope** is a piece of very thick, N COUNT strong string, usually made of hemp or nylon. EG *One of the characters in the play hangs herself with a rope... She picked up the end of the rope, and pulled with all her might.* ► used as an uncount noun. EG *...a ► N UNCOUNT piece of rope.*

9.5 The change may involve the frequent use of a noun before another noun as if it were an adjective.

background ... 2 The **background** to an important event or situation consists of the facts that help to explain what caused it, why it happened in a particular way or at a particular time. EG *...the economic background to the present political crisis...* ► used as an adjective. EG *...background information.*

10 The use of ◇

10.1 Derived words can appear within an entry in small bold letters after the symbol ◇. They are words which are formed from the entry word by the addition of a suffix, according to rules that apply very generally in English. The words formed in this way are very similar in meaning to the entry word or to the particular meaning of the entry word in the paragraph or sub-paragraph in which they are placed. In such cases, there is no separate entry for the derived word.

touchy ... 1 A **touchy** person is easily upset, offended or irritated. EG *He thinks that all continental people are sensitive and touchy... They are touchy about criticism.*
◇ **touchiness**. EG *She was amused by his touchiness.*

Guide to the Use of the Dictionary

10.2 Derived words include for example, adverbs that are *formed from adjectives by adding -ly* (eg. *bravely from brave*) or nouns and adjectives that are formed from verbs by adding -ing, -ness, -ity, -tion, etc. Grammatical information about all such words is given in the extra column.

adamant ... If you are **adamant** about something, you are determined not to change your mind about it. EG *The government remains adamant that it will not give yield to pressure* ... **adamantly**.
EG *They are adamantly opposed to continued high U.S. interest rates.*

10.3 However, where a derived word is very common or has a different meaning from the entry word from which it is formed, it is given as a separate entry at its correct place in the alphabetical list.

11 The use of ●

11.1 The symbol ● is used to introduce two different types of information: phrases or expressions and cross-references.

11.2 Phrases or expressions are groups of two or more words, including the entry word, that occur regularly in a particular combination which has a very different meaning from that of the entry word by itself. The main words of the phrase or expression are in bold letters.

11.3 They are usually placed at the end of a paragraph or sub-paragraph if they are very close in meaning to the meaning explained in that paragraph.

sailor ... A **sailor** is a person who works on a ship as a member of its crew. EG *He had been a sailor in the Italian navy.* ● If you are a **good sailor**, you are able to travel on a boat in rough weather without being seasick. EG *I thought you were a good sailor.*

11.4 If a phrase or expression is very frequently used, or is not very close in meaning to any other uses, it may be explained in a separate paragraph.

11.5 If there are many phrases or expressions at one entry, they are often grouped together in one paragraph at or near the end of the entry.

bag ... 8 The word **bag** is also used in the following expressions in informal English.

8.1 If you say that something is **in the bag**, you mean that you are certain that you will get it or achieve it. **8.2** If you **pack your bags**, you leave a place where you have been living. EG *I decided it was time to pack my bags.* **8.3** If you are thrown out of a place **bag and baggage**, you are made to leave and take all your belongings with you ... ● **to let the cat out of the bag**: see cat. ● **a mixed bag**: see mix ...

11.6 Cross-references indicate that more information about a word will be found at another entry, which is shown in bold letters immediately after the word 'See' or the words 'See also'.

attack ... **6** An **attack** of an illness is a short period in which you suffer badly from it and cannot control it. EG *I had an attack of giddiness... She had been left totally deaf by an attack of smallpox.* ● See also **heart attack**.

11.7 Cross-references may also indicate that a phrasal verb has a noun or adjective derived from it, which will be found as a separate entry.

break in ... 1 If someone **breaks in** or **breaks into** a building, they get into it by force ... ● See also **break-in**. PHRASAL VB. V + ADV/PREP

break-in ... A **break-in** is the act of getting into a building by force... N COUNT

11.8 If there are several cross-references from one entry to other entries in this dictionary, they are grouped together in one paragraph at the end of the entry, after the phrases or expressions and before the phrasal verbs (see 12).

land ... 16 If someone **lands** on their feet, they are lucky and successful after being in a difficult situation.

17 See also **landed, landing**. ● **the lie of the land**: See lie. ● **to see how the land lies**: see lie.

land up, if you **land up** in a place or situation, you ...

12 Phrasal verbs

12.1 Phrasal verbs are items which consist of a verb and a preposition or adverb and which have a separate meaning, often very different from the meaning of the verb by itself or with other prepositions and adverbs.

12.2 Phrasal verbs are placed at the end of a verb entry. Two or more phrasal verbs in the same entry are placed in alphabetical order within that entry.

12.3 A phrasal verb is printed in large bold letters like an entry, but is not placed at the left-most margin.

bring ... 1 When you **bring** someone or something ...

23 If something **brings** a particular price, it can be sold for that price ...

24 ● **to bring something into being**: see **being**.

bring about. To **bring** something about means to cause it to happen ...

bring along. If you **bring** someone or something **along**, you bring them with you when you come to a place ...

bring-and-buy-sale ...

brink ...

12.4 Only one form is given for a phrasal verb, because the other forms will always be the same as for the main word of the entry at which they occur.

12.5 Sometimes, if two phrasal verbs have the same meaning or meanings, they are explained in the same place. If the two phrasal verbs would normally be next to each other in the alphabetical order, the second one is not given a separate entry.

mess about ... 1 If you **mess about** or **mess around**, 1.1 you spend time doing things without any particular purpose or plan ...

EG ... *talking, playing, messing about together... Some of the lads had been messing around when they should have been working... There was no messing about. When you got a job you had to get on with it.* 1.2 you interfere with things in a harmful way; used showing disapproval. EG *She didn't want you coming and messing about with things.* 1.3 you behave in a joking, teasing or silly way. EG *Stop messing about! I'm trying to tell you something important.*

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2 if you **mess** someone **about** or you **mess** someone **around**, you treat them badly for example by not being honest with them, or by continually changing plans which affect them. EG *You've been messing me about all summer and I'm fed up with it.*

13 Extra column

13.1 The extra column in this dictionary is used to give two different types of information: grammar notes and semantic relationships.

13.2 **Grammar notes** are given in abbreviated form in capital letters with some symbols such as \uparrow and \downarrow . A full list of words used in the notes and an explanation of the symbols is given on page xiii.

abdominal ... is used to describe something that is situated in the abdomen or forms part of it. EG *They suffered abdominal pains.* ADJ CLASSIF.USU ATTRIB

absorb ... 1 If something **absorbs** a liquid or gas, it soaks it up or draws it in ... v - o

accomplice ... Someone's **accomplice** is a person who helps them to commit a crime or to do something wrong. EG *She was betrayed by her accomplice.* N COUNT.USU POSS + N

13.3 Each grammar note is explained inside a box at its correct place in the alphabetical entry list of the dictionary.

ad infinitum ... If something happens or goes on **ad infinitum**, it is repeated again and again in the same way. EG *She then teaches it to her daughter, and so on ad infinitum.*

ADJ \square In this dictionary ADJ is used in the grammar notes beside entries to mean 'adjective'. For explanations of different kinds of adjective see \square at ADJ AFTER N, ADJ CLASSIF., ADJ COLOUR, and ADJ QUALIT. See also \square at ATTRIB and PREF.

adjacent ... if something is **adjacent** to something else...

13.4 Sequences of letters and symbols that occur frequently are also explained at their correct place in the alphabetical entry list of the dictionary, ignoring any symbols.

V-necked ...
V + O \square ...
V + O + A \square ...
VOC \square ...
V + O + C \square ...
vocabulary ...

13.5 Words that appear in italics in the grammar notes indicate that they are the words most commonly used with the entry word in a particular grammatical structure.

disadvantageous ... Something that is **disadvantageous** is harmful or likely to cause problems for you. EG *These factors made the 1976 agreement disadvantageous to the British.* ADJ QUALIT IF + PREP THEN

13.6 **Semantic relationships:** Words that appear in the extra column after the symbols \uparrow , $=$ and \neq are semantic

references. They offer users similar or opposite words for the word that is being explained.

13.7 The symbol \uparrow indicates that the following word has a more general meaning similar to the entry word or a particular use of the entry word. Such a word is called a superordinate.

automobile ... An **automobile** is a car, used especially in American English. N COUNT vehicle

13.8 The symbol $=$ indicates that the following word is a synonym, and so is very similar in meaning to the entry word or use and can often be used instead of it.

assiduous ... Someone who is **assiduous** works hard or does things with care and dedication. EG ... an *assiduous student.* ADJ QUALIT diligent

13.9 The symbol \neq indicates that the following word is an antonym, and so is often used with the opposite meaning to that of the entry word or use.

badly off ... 1 If you are **badly off** for something that you need or want, you do not have enough of it. EG *The school is really quite badly off for books.* ADJ QUALIT PRED.USU + for well-off

amateur ... 1 An **amateur** is someone who does something such as acting or playing a sport as a hobby and not as a job. EG *It's a business for professionals not amateurs.* N COUNT professional

14 **Usage:** In this dictionary we have employed a variety of strategies to indicate when a word is mainly used by a particular group of people or in a particular social context, or is used in order to convey an attitude or opinion of someone or something. This information has been placed at different points in the entries depending on its importance when using the word, although normally it comes after the explanation of meaning.

ostracism ... is the state of being ostracized or the act of ostracizing someone: a formal word.

bathroom ... 2 Some people say **bathroom** as a polite way of referring to the toilet; used especially in American English. EG *Can I go to the bathroom please?*

acquisitive ... Someone who is **acquisitive** is fond of getting new possessions; used showing disapproval. EG *He's a very acquisitive sort of person.*

after ... 21 Some British people refer to the pudding course of a meal as **afters**; an informal use. EG *What's for afters?*

bathe ... 2 In American English, to **bathe** means to have a bath. EG *After golf I would return to the flat to bathe and change for work.*

bathos ... is a sudden change in speech or writing from a serious or important subject to a ridiculous or very ordinary one; a technical term in literary criticism.

Pronunciation

In this dictionary a guide is given to the pronunciation of English words using the International Phonetic Alphabet. The accent represented is Received Pronunciation, or RP for short, which is a special type of Southern British English. There are several other accents of English, but RP is perhaps most widely used as a norm for teaching purposes.

Two kinds of information are needed if a word is to be properly pronounced: we need to know about each of the sounds that make up the word, and we need to know about stress. In each of the pronunciations shown in this dictionary, at least one vowel symbol is in heavier type and underlined. Sometimes more than one vowel is in heavier type:

result /rɪzʌlt/
disəpɔɪntɪŋ /dɪsəpɔɪntɪŋ/

Heavy type and underlining signifies stress when the word is spoken in isolation. If two syllables are marked in this way, the second has primary stress while the first has secondary stress; if only one is marked, it has primary stress. A word spoken in isolation is called the citation form.

There is a more varied pattern of stress when the word is used in context. Quite commonly one of the stresses found in the citation form, or even both of the stresses, will be absent. The one-stress or two-stress patterns of English speech are associated not with individual words but with the information units that a speaker constructs:

The **result** was disəpɔɪntɪŋ
 /ðə rɪzʌlt wəz dɪsəpɔɪntɪŋ/

A disəpɔɪntɪŋ **result**
 /ə dɪsəpɔɪntɪŋ rɪzʌlt/

Very disappointing indeed
 /vɛrɪ' dɪsəpɔɪntɪŋ ɪndiːd/

This information cannot be given in advance in a dictionary.

If a vowel is shown in heavy type, this indicates not only its role in being able to take stress, but also something about the way in which it is pronounced. Any vowel marked in heavy type and underlined is a protected vowel. This means that there is very little variation in the way in which a speaker pronounces it, whether or not it actually gets a stress in the information unit in which it occurs. In /sɪʌtɪ/ (city), the protected vowel /ɪ/ is unvariable within the chosen accent, but the unprotected vowel /i/ can vary between /ɪ/ and /i:/ in the usage of a single speaker.

In many cases, the amount of variation is negligible. Where it is not, where an unprotected vowel can range over several different sounds, there are small superscript numbers printed just above and beside the vowel symbol. The numbers indicate the range of likely variation. So, for example, /ɔ/ means variation between /ɔ/ and /ɔ:/ as in /sɪnə'mə/ (cinema); /ɪ/ means variation between /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ as in /ju:slɪ's/ (useless).

Some sounds, both vowels and consonants, are heard only in rather slow and careful speech. /ju:ʒuəl (usual) and /kɒləmnɪst/ (columnist) are often heard as /ju:ʒɔ:l/ and /kɒləmnɪst/. In such cases, the superscript ^o indicates variation between full pronunciation of the sound and no pronunciation:

/ju:^oʒəl/, /kɒləmnɪst/

All superscripts and the variations that they stand for are given in the key below.

Pronunciation Key

Symbols Used

| | |
|-----|--|
| ɔ: | heart, start, calm. |
| æ | act, mass, lap. |
| aɪ | dive, cry, mind. |
| aɪə | fire, tyre, buyer. |
| aʊ | out, down, loud. |
| aʊə | flour, tower, sour. |
| ɛ | met, lend, pen. |
| ɛɪ | say, main, weight. |
| ɛɪə | fair, care, wear. |
| ɪ | fit, win, list. |
| i: | feed, me, beat. |
| ɪ: | near, beard, clear. |
| ɒ | lot, lost, spot. |
| ɔ: | note, phone, coat. |
| ɔ: | more, cord, claw. |
| ɔ: | boy, coin, joint. |
| u | could, stood, hood. |
| u | you, use, choose. |
| ʊə | sure, poor, cure. |
| ɜ: | turn, third, word. |
| ʌ | but, fund, must. |
| ə | the weak vowel in butter, about, forgotten. |

| | |
|----|---------|
| b | bed |
| d | done |
| f | fit |
| g | good |
| h | hat |
| j | yellow |
| k | king |
| l | lip |
| m | mat |
| n | nine |
| p | pay |
| r | run |
| s | soon |
| t | talk |
| v | van |
| w | win |
| x | loch |
| z | zoo |
| ʃ | ship |
| ʒ | measure |
| ŋ | sing |
| tʃ | cheap |
| θ | thin |
| ð | then |
| dʒ | joy |

Superscripts

| | | | |
|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| ɔ ⁰ | (ɔ ↔ 0) | ɪ ⁰ | (ɪ ↔ 0) |
| ɔ ¹ | (ɔ ↔ ɪ) | ɪ ¹ | (ɪ ↔ ɔ) |
| ɔ ² | (ɔ ↔ ɛ) | ɪ ² | (ɪ ↔ ɛ) |
| ɔ ³ | (ɔ ↔ æ) | ɪ ³ | (ɪ ↔ ɛɪ) |
| ɔ ⁴ | (ɔ ↔ ʊ) | ɪ ⁴ | (ɪ ↔ aɪ) |
| ɔ ⁵ | (ɔ ↔ aɪ) | i ¹ | (ɪ ↔ i:) |
| ɔ ⁶ | (ɔ ↔ əʊ) | ɛ ¹ | (ɛ ↔ ɪ) |
| ɔ ⁷ | (ɔ ↔ ɒ) | u ¹ | (u ↔ ʊ) |
| ɔ ⁸ | (ɔ ↔ ɔ:) | m ¹ | (m ↔ ɱ) |
| ɔ ⁹ | (ɔ ↔ ʌ) | ŋ ¹ | (ŋ ↔ ɲ) |

^o after a consonant symbol indicates probable omission; k^o, t^o, h^o, etc.

Special Entries

Below is a list of all the special entries contained in this dictionary. The special entries explain how to read the grammar notes in the extra column.

The following punctuation symbols are used in the grammar notes.

, A comma is used to show that two or more word classes are listed within the same grammar note, when all of them apply to the same paragraph or subparagraph. The comma separates the classes, and the last class is introduced by OR. For example, V, V+O, OR V+REPORT-CL means that the verb may be used in three ways: it may occur without an object, it may occur with an object, or it may occur with a report clause.

:

A colon is used to introduce extra information after the basic word class has been stated. For example, ADJ CLASSIF: ATTRIB means that the classifying adjective is used in front of a noun.

/

A slash is used between two alternatives in the grammar notes. For example, N COUNT/UNCOUNT means that the noun can be used as either a count noun or an uncount noun. V+O: IF+PREP THEN *with/against* means that if there is a preposition after this verb structure, the preposition is normally *with* or *against*.

()

Brackets are mainly used in the grammar notes beside verbs. They show that a particular sort of object or adjunct is used. For example, V+O(REFL) means that the object of the verb is a reflexive pronoun. V+O(NG/REFL) means that the object of the verb is either a noun group or a reflexive pronoun. V+A(*to*) means that the verb is followed by an adjunct that begins with the preposition *to*.

+ A plus is used in two ways. With verbs, it is used to show that the verb occurs with an object (V+O) or an adjunct (V+A). With other words, it is used to show that the word is followed by a particular item. For example, ADV+ADJ/ADV means that the adverb is typically followed by an adjective or another adverb.

The following words are also used in the grammar notes.

USU means 'usually'. For example, a verb with the grammar note V+O: USU PASS is usually but not always used in the passive.

ONLY is used to report that we only have evidence showing that the word is used in this particular way. For example, V+O: ONLY PASS means that we have only found the verb used in the passive.

ALSO is used to mention an additional or alternative grammatical use. For example, N COUNT: ALSO IN TITLES means that a count noun can also be used as part of a title.

BEFORE and AFTER are used to show the normal order in which the grammatical items occur. For example N BEFORE N means that the noun is used in front of another noun; ADV AFTER VB means that the adverb is used following a verb.

WITH is used to say that a word normally occurs in company with a word from a particular class of words, which may occur before or after it. For example, ADV WITH VB means that the adverb normally occurs in company with a verb.

List of Special Entries

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|------------|------------|
| A | DARE | NAME | RECIP |
| ADJ | DATE | NEED | REFL |
| ADJ AFTER N | DET | NEG | REPORT CL |
| ADJ CLASSIF | DETPOSS | NG | S |
| ADJ COLOUR | DO | NUM | SEMI MODAL |
| ADJ QUALIT | EXCLAM | NUMBER | SUFFIX |
| ADV | HAVE | O | SUPERL |
| ADV AFTER VB | IMPER | ORDINAL | SUPP |
| ADV BRD NEG | INF | PASS | TIME |
| ADV SEN | -ING | PAST PART | TITLE |
| ADV WITH VB | MEASUREMENT | PHR | to-INF |
| ADV + ADJ/ADV | MOD | PHRASAL VB | USED |
| AGE | MODAL | POSS | USU |
| ATTRIB | MONEY | PRED | V |
| AUX | N | PREDET | V-ERG |
| BE | N BEFORE N | PREFIX | V+A |
| BROAD NEG | N COUNT | PREP | V+C |
| C | N MASS | PRON | V+O |
| COMB | N PART | PRON INDEF | V+O+A |
| COMPAR | N PLURAL | PRONPOSS | V+O+C |
| CONJ COORD | N PROPER | PRON REFL | V+O+O |
| CONJ SUBORD | N SING | PRON REL | VB |
| CONT | N UNCOUNT | QUANTIF | VOC |
| CONVENTION | N UNCOUNT/COUNT | QUOTE | WH |

Introduction

The COBUILD Dictionary

This dictionary is for people who want to use modern English. It offers more, and more accurate, information on the way modern English is used than any previous dictionary. It is a useful guide to writing and speaking English as well as an aid to reading and understanding.

This dictionary looks rather like most others if you don't look too closely. Actually it is quite new and different. The techniques used to compile it are new and use advanced computer technology. For the user the kind of information is different, the quality of information is different, and the presentation of the information is different.

For the first time, a dictionary has been compiled by the thorough examination of a representative group of English texts, spoken and written, running to many millions of words. This means that in addition to all the tools of the conventional dictionary makers - wide reading and experience of English, other dictionaries and of course eyes and ears - this dictionary is based on hard, measurable evidence. No major uses are missed, and the number of times a use occurs has a strong influence on the way the entries are organized. Equally, the large group of texts, called the corpus, gives us reasonable grounds for omitting many uses and word-forms that do not occur in it. It is difficult for a conventional dictionary, in the absence of evidence, to decide what to leave out, and a lot of quite misleading information is thus preserved in the tradition of lexicography.

This dictionary makes a break with such traditions. We have gone back to basics and collected many millions of words, and put them into a very large computer. The dictionary team has had daily access to about 20 million words, with many more in specialized stores. The words came from books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets, conversations, radio and television broadcasts. The sources are gratefully acknowledged on page xxii. The aim was to provide a fair representation of contemporary English.

No set of texts, however large, can be fully relied on; all the time the information from the texts has been analysed and appraised by a team of lexicographers, whose professional knowledge has also been used wherever there is only a small amount of evidence of the usage of a word or phrase.

The quality of information in this dictionary is different from others. With our textual evidence it is possible to be precise about the shape of phrases and the extent of their variation; the relative importance of different senses of a word; and the typical environment in which a word or phrase is used. Even when statements like this are already familiar, they are made with a different kind of authority in this book.

Examples

Because of this opportunity to show the actual language to users of it, the examples in this dictionary have a new status and do a different job from examples in the conventional tradition. These examples are taken from actual texts wherever possible.

The use of 'citation' from actual texts is a noble tradition in lexicography. You will find cited examples in Dr Johnson's famous Dictionary of 1755 and in the Oxford English Dictionary begun by Murray in 1878. In the development of language teaching materials, however, in recent years it has become a habit to make up examples to illustrate a particular usage.

These examples have no authority apart from the thoughts of the person who creates them and they are very often quite unnatural. It is frequently difficult to imagine where they might be used in everyday speech and writing.

This language tradition has spilled over into the dictionaries that are specially written for language learners. However, in this dictionary we return to the well-established practice of selecting examples from actual instances.

Some of the examples are slightly adapted from the citation in our text files. In all cases we have attempted to preserve the common pattern of use, and have only changed or omitted words that seemed to us not to be affecting the use. The length of examples is critical in a dictionary that includes so many and, inevitably, some of them have been shortened. Occasionally also an example has been edited to make it easier to understand when it is removed from its context. Only on very rare occasions have we composed an example because there is no suitable one in the corpus.

The user can thus be confident that the examples display the language as it is used. Not only that, but the examples printed are typical of usage. A selection is normally made after a comparison of dozens of examples, and in the case of everyday words, hundreds or thousands.

We expect these examples to do a quite different job from invented examples; something more like the job done in Dr Johnson's dictionary and the OED. They are examples of good practice. They support the explanations and they illustrate usage. They provide a reliable guide for speaking and writing in the English of today.

In contrast, invented examples are really part of the explanations. They have no independent authority or reason for their existence, and they are constructed to refine the explanations and in many cases to clarify the explanations. They give no reliable guide to composition in English and would be very misleading if applied to that task. They do not say 'This is how the word is used', but rather 'This will help you to understand the sense'. We are so accustomed to invented examples that we often forget that they are only of value in helping to explain. Usage cannot be invented, it can only be recorded.

In this dictionary the examples show how the words are used, and in addition, of course, they give help in understanding the sense.

We expect that the user will find the examples interesting and sometimes unusual. They occasionally contain difficult words and phrases and they may sometimes illustrate uses and senses which seem slightly different from the explanations. This is because the examples in this dictionary give independent information about the language, sometimes extending what it is possible to write into

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the explanation. Extensive testing has convinced us that users appreciate examples of this kind, that they become accustomed to using them. In the first place examples from real usage are primary evidence and complement the secondary evidence of the explanation. In the second place, the open-ended nature of these examples, the way in which they are taken from the vast repertoire of English, give the student a feeling of genuine access to the language, including some of those more untidy and difficult aspects.

The examples are thus a major feature of this book and we hope that their richness and variety will be extensively used, and that their function will be fully understood and appreciated.

Style of Presentation

It is a principle of this dictionary that it should be easily understood by the learner for whom it is designed. Obviously, if the style of a dictionary is too difficult or too condensed for users, the work is useless.

This dictionary also breaks with a long-established tradition in the style in which the entries are written. Over the years, originally for reasons of space, dictionaries have established dozens of stylistic conventions, which require to be learned in addition to learning the everyday language before the dictionary can be fully understood. There are all sorts of uses of brackets and punctuation; of symbols and type faces, of abbreviations and special words. They make most dictionaries into texts which are obscure to most of their users, even native speakers.

For example, standard dictionaries will tell you that one meaning of *throw* is *to be subjected to (a fit) or to have (fit, tantrum, etc)*.

The compilers of this dictionary have considered each convention carefully, and rejected all but a few of them because of the trouble they cause. Those that are left represent what we believe to be the minimum consistent with economy and clarity. The dictionary is designed to read like ordinary English. Words appear in their normal full spelling forms and the explanations are written in real sentences.

The word being explained is normally mentioned in the explanation in such a way that you can see how it is typically used in English.

For example: **throw** 18 If you **throw** a fit or tantrum, you suddenly lose control of yourself or your emotions.

In many cases, the explanation provides an illustration of the word in its typical grammatical context. This is thought to be more useful than an attempt to account for the meaning of the word in isolation.

The wording of each explanation shows the basic word class. So, the entry for an ordinary count noun like *door*, will begin, 'A **door** is ...'

An entry for a transitive verb like *conceal* will begin, 'If you **conceal** something, you ...' This suggests that the verb in this sense is typically used with a human subject and a wide range of direct objects, which are typically inanimate or abstract rather than human.

Variations of this style show variations in the typical range of grammatical subject and object. An explanation that begins, 'To **sink** a ship means to ...' implies that the range of typical subjects is very wide indeed - including both humans and inanimate objects - but that the range of direct objects for this sense is restricted to ships and things like ships.

In these explanations, the words 'if you say that...'

very often signal metaphoric, figurative, and other non-literal meanings.

For example: **glue** 4 If you say that someone's eyes are **glued** to something, you mean that they are watching it with all their attention.

Extra Column

The most noticeable departure from everyday English will be found in the extra notes at the side of each column. This is a new feature which has been added to increase the amount of systematic information given to the user.

The main entries are self-standing and it is never necessary to consult the Extra Column for everyday purposes. But this dictionary is designed for a wide range of users, including students and teachers who need quite a lot of technical information.

The main aim of the Extra Column is to provide the more advanced student with structural information, extending the statements of the main entry. It gives a word class, and indicates the range of syntactic uses. It points out typical syntactic patterns and choices available to the user of English, often going beyond what it is possible to give in examples.

One important reason for creating the Extra Column is to keep the main dictionary text simple and accessible. We did not want to keep interrupting the flow of entries with abbreviations and technical terms. Nor did we want to have hundreds of grammar codes, as some dictionaries have, which can only be understood by looking up another part of the book.

The terminology used here is fairly easy to understand and the statements give detailed information which would be too lengthy to include if it was written out fully. It is hoped that the conventions of the Extra Column will be quickly mastered by post-intermediate students, thus adding to the value of the dictionary. The terms used in the Extra Column are explained in the dictionary and you will find the entries in normal alphabetical order. For example, there is a full explanation of *SUPP* between *supine* and *supper*. It has a box drawn round it to make it easy to find.

In addition, there is a quick reference guide on page vii.

The Extra Column puts the words and phrases into categories. For example alongside sense 22 of *back* is the code *N COUNT + SUPP*. It is fairly easy to see that this means that *back* can be used as a count noun, and the noun group which it heads will normally have a supplement, and a *back* is not likely to appear on its own. If you are not sure what is meant by a count noun, then look up the special entry at *N COUNT*; if you want to know more about supplements, look up the special entry at *SUPP*. More examples are given in the special entry to tell you the range and variety of supplements and the typical nouns that take them.

So the Extra Column contains a large number of grammatical notes about individual words and senses. More than that, it draws attention to grammatical patterns which are common for that word in that sense. It is rare for grammar books to separate the patterns which actually occur from the ones which can in theory occur; it is also rare for grammars to be careful about relating the grammar to an individual sense of a word.

The Extra Column entries thus provide very substantial information which is otherwise difficult to record in a dictionary, but which is immensely useful for composing speech and writing in English. It is important, therefore to understand its function properly.

Introduction

The Extra Column notes are written to apply only to the words alongside them. They are based on observation of the actual patterning of words and so they are intended to give guidance as to how the words can be used. The Extra Column does not constitute a grammar of English which can be separated from the rest of the dictionary because that would go well beyond the notes in a dictionary. It is a powerful aid and a support to the rest of the entry.

The main point to note is that a separate grammar would tell you what is, in principle, possible in the way of constructions. Such a grammar is not usually concerned with what actually occurs or is likely to occur. Grammars can produce structures which are quite correct, but which are not at all likely to be used. For example the verb *mightn't have been going to be tested* or the noun group *all seven of the very happy old brown grass-eating garden rodents*, are quite correct in grammar. But it is most unlikely that such complicated combinations would actually be used in a text.

The Extra Column of this dictionary contrasts very sharply with this sort of grammar. From all of the virtually endless combinations and permutations it picks out what is typical of the use of the word as found in the text collection. Hence the entries for apparently similar words or senses will only be identical if they are used in just the same way as each other. Apart from trivial variations in phrasing, which we have done our best to standardize, a marked difference in the Extra Column will probably indicate a difference of typical structure, of emphasis or frequency, or a noticeable tendency towards one pattern rather than another. Our policy is one of caution, so that the Extra Column entries should draw attention only to prominent features of the word in question.

As well as grammatical notes, we have included semantic information in the Extra Column wherever possible. Words of similar meaning (synonyms) and opposite meaning (antonyms) are noted, and more general words (superordinates) also. These allow meanings to be related to each other, so that the users can add to their vocabulary by making use of the dictionary.

Word and Environment

The most important result that has come from the work of preparing this dictionary concerns the way in which the patterns of words with each other are related to the meanings and uses of the words. However, it is difficult to show such patterns clearly in a dictionary. Every dictionary is based on an alphabetical list of words, and such an organization may lead people to believe that the senses of a word can be explained and illustrated without reference to other words. That is occasionally the case. Overwhelmingly, however, the sense of a word is bound up with a particular usage - a syntactic pattern perhaps, or a close association of words or a grouping of words into a set phrase. It is not really possible to talk about the meaning of the word in isolation - it only has a particular meaning when it is in a particular environment.

Some common words have very little independent meaning - the word *bet*, for example. The commonest use of *bet* is with *I* in front of it (often a modal verb between them), and it is used to add conviction to a statement a person is making: *I bet nobody's been here before*. If, however, the pronoun *you* appears in front of *bet* (without a modal and as a whole sentence) it is used as an enthusiastic response: *'Are you going to go?'* - *'You bet!'*

Several nouns are frequently qualified by the adjective *hard*. We talk of *hard luck*, *hard facts*, and *hard evidence*. We can also talk about *strong evidence* but are unlikely to use 'strong facts' or 'strong luck'; *tough luck* but not 'tough facts' or 'tough evidence'; *sad facts* but not 'sad luck' or 'sad evidence'. Of course, it is always possible to depart from the normal patterns of English, so it is not claimed that 'sad evidence' cannot occur - just that it's not worth following as a pattern.

Note that in the above examples of *hard*, there are two rather different meanings. In *hard luck*, *hard* means 'unfortunate', but in *hard facts* and *hard evidence* it means 'unlikely to be proved wrong'. Despite this, the patterns of collocation show that the near-synonym *strong* goes only with *evidence*. So the patterns of collocation are not governed by meaning.

The dictionary offers a lot of help in making this area clear. The style of explanation is equally capable of presenting single words or phrases, and can give alternatives. The examples pay careful attention to collocation and typical phrasing. The Extra Column is often useful for stating the limits of a usage, and its typical features; it may give a syntactic pattern that always, or nearly always, carries the usage; or it may point out that one preposition in particular is used, and no other, or that a usage is normally passive.

In addition to these features, the dictionary also uses cross references to help you find a usage that consists of more than one word.

Common Words

This dictionary makes a feature of the very common words of the language and pays them very close attention. Much more space is devoted to them than in any other dictionary of a similar size. Every dictionary has entries for the very common grammatical words of the language like *the*, *and*, *of*. However, we do not think that users find these entries very helpful. They are difficult to understand and they are attempts at arrangements by meaning rather than usage. It is clear from COBUILD research that the very common words in English have most of their usage in the sort of patterns just discussed in the previous section. The information needed to understand such words is largely found by studying their usage rather than their semantic content. Most dictionaries do not record usage in a way that brings this out.

This dictionary presents and explains the uses of these words in special ways. This makes them prominent and might cause some people to wonder why such an emphasis is put on words that are often called 'purely grammatical', 'empty', etc. There is an issue of principle here which we believe to be most important.

First of all, consider some basic facts about how often words occur in people's use of English. Studies of the way in which words occur in texts all come up with the same basic message: most actual usage is of frequent words. A relatively small number of words account for a very large percentage of what is written and spoken every day.

The following occur about once in every hundred thousand words: *secretly*, *jet*, *core*, *agony*, *preparation*, *privileged*.

The following are typical of words that occur about once in every ten thousand words: *speak*, *green*, *maybe*, *quickly*, *sorry*.

The following are typical of words that occur about once in every thousand words: *two*, *over*, *get*, *because*, *see*, *don't*.

Words like these occur about once in every hundred words: *in*, *that*.

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A few words occur even more frequently, for example: *the, and, of*.

So in most texts that you will read, or in talks you will hear, or in conversations you will have, about three words in every four are the common ones.

These facts have been known for over fifty years, but their significance has been overlooked. Dictionaries have given a lot of space to the very rare and unusual words, which are interesting, no doubt, but not very useful, especially to someone who wants to write or speak good English.

The importance of very frequent words is not confined to the 50 or 100 commonest. The same features show in the top 2000-3000 words - those of great usefulness and complex usage, with a strong tendency to form patterns with words about them. They are the power-house of the language. Fluency in using these words is of much more value than knowing all sorts of peculiar words that are hardly ever used.

For many years scholars have searched for a 'basic English' that will make international communication easier. Up till now they did not have the facts with which to select and describe the core of the language, and they met serious problems. Whenever you restrict people who have a command of a language, they will rebel; whenever you distort their language, you will be ignored. In the treatment of common words in this book there is an invitation to devise your own basic English.

Non-native users of English have found it difficult to get access to the natural patterns of English, because the patterns presented to them are often not natural. They have resorted to building up a large vocabulary instead. Now they have a choice.

The Word List

Which words, then, should we put in a dictionary? The first answer, that most lexicographers will applaud, is 'as many as possible'. But there are still a number of different ways to organize the words. A dictionary for use in producing language and in communication in general, will pay attention to the statistics given above. The common words are very important. What is more, our research shows that the common words have many different patterns of use, and a subtle range of meanings. The simplest words for the lexicographer are the not very common ones with just one clear meaning, like *jabber, jackal, jackass, jackdaw* and *jacuzzi*.

This dictionary takes on the job of making a useful, readable and reliable description of the central core of the language. The book as a whole is big enough to ensure that, despite this, the less common vocabulary is not neglected, and there is information here on over forty thousand words. But do not look here for obsolete or dialectal or highly technical words. This dictionary is designed for everyday use.

It follows from this that if your English is already quite good, the information given in this book will often confirm what you already thought was likely. That is a most important function - just as important as informing you of something you had no idea about. How often do you turn to a dictionary to learn something utterly new? Anyone who can understand this Introduction or use the dictionary at all is already quite good at English. But for a number of reasons, you may seek reassurance that a word means what you think it means, or that a construction is made in one way rather than another. A language is capable of a great range of variation from the main patterns, but nevertheless has some underlying strict rules, and both

the rules and the main variations can be got from these pages.

So this book is offered in part as a valuable way of bringing to your attention things that you were vaguely aware of anyway; of formulating them and clarifying areas of doubt concerning the limits of their use; of giving support and confidence in modern English usage. You will often find what you want by noticing an example that it close to your needs, or by skimming down the Extra Column for the sort of pattern you are interested in.

You may come across a sentence like *That is what we need so badly*, and you may feel sure that the usual meaning of *bad* is not appropriate. You get the strong impression that it is just being used to intensify the meaning of *need*, and the word *so* is often used in a meaning close to *very*. When you look up the dictionary, which says 'If you need or want something **badly**, you need or want it very much', you find you were correct, and the dictionary has helped you to make sure, and to give you more confidence in using it in your own speaking and writing.

Do not undervalue this function of the dictionary. Users of a language are not necessarily accurate reporters of usage, even their own. Most of our skill in using language is unconscious, and therefore difficult to recall, though easy to recognize. This is a surprising point, and very easy to test out in any language. Just take an ordinary piece of writing, and ask someone to read out any two consecutive words. Try to guess the next word. Usually you will not manage to guess it exactly, but when it is eventually read out it will usually fit in perfectly with the rest of the text.

Apart from the function of confirming our guesses, the dictionary offers a large amount of new information to any user. This will extend and improve usage and understanding, and help learners to use the language more skilfully.

Meaning and Function

Words and phrases *do* things. People apologize, invite, insult, mollify, persuade, and a hundred other things using words. Quite often a function of this kind is associated with a particular word or phrase, and in this dictionary we try to draw attention to such functions. They are just as important as the meanings.

In the case of phrases, it is sometimes difficult to record these in an alphabetical dictionary. Many groups of common words like *by the way, for one thing*, do not contain an obvious word for indexing purposes, and there is no terminology in common use. Nevertheless we have tried to present all the main phrases that have a function associated with them.

Those words which have a specialized function in conversation or writing are noted in the same way as meanings. So for example **better 8**, as in '**you'd better** make some notes' is said to be a polite way of telling, advising, warning or threatening people. Another example is *no kidding* which, in informal spoken English, is used to emphasize that what you are saying is true.

Many such functions have to do with organizing the discourse. For instance, there are markers of boundaries in conversation, like *right, now, okay: Right, I'm going to talk this afternoon about (fire hazards)...Okay, I think we'll stop there...Anyway, so much for modern art*.

If you want to make what you are saying sound less definite, forceful, or dogmatic, and therefore more acceptable to your audience you can use a phrase like *I don't know*, which you find at **know 20.2: I don't know**

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about you, but (I didn't like it at all)... I don't really know how to put it, it's not really an arts subject.

You could also use a fixed expression like *all things considered*: *He's okay, all things considered.*

There are lots of ways in which we emphasize the points that we make. Some common adverbs are used like very in: *they treated me very badly.*

Some fixed expressions are also used to emphasize what you are saying, like *here and now*, **here** 11: *I'll say here and now that I don't believe in ghosts.*

Another useful function is to draw the attention of the hearer or reader to what you are about to say. For example, **as** 14 refers to phrases like *as for myself*: *As for myself, I had a glass of juice three times a day.*

Very general nouns such as *thing* or *aspect* are often used to indicate to the hearer that you are about to mention something more specific: *The other thing of course is that people never take him seriously... Far and away the most important aspect is the person's disposition.*

This dictionary pays particular attention to the functions of words and phrases, giving thousands of examples of the kinds of functions that have just been illustrated.

Organization of Entries

Dictionaries vary a lot in the way in which an entry is put together. This dictionary follows a simple principle of trying to make it easy for users to find what they want. So longer entries are divided up into sections and paragraphs, and phrases are gathered together at the end of a section. There are detailed notes on the organization on page viii.

To begin with, the entry contains information on the spelling, pronunciation and inflection of a word. All the different inflectional forms are listed. Then the first sense is given.

Wherever possible the first sense is a common one, and a fairly easy one - usually the sense that most people would expect. Unlike other dictionaries, this one is written in the knowledge of which are the common senses or usages, and this is taken into account. But because the commonest meaning is often not a clear and independent one, it is not always put first.

For example, about half the examples in the corpus of *bet* are of the sense numbered 3. There are not nearly as many examples of the senses 1 or 2, which are to do with risking money on a chance. But these senses are felt to be the ones to begin a description with. It is easy to identify the central, core meaning of a word. Most people who know the language well will agree that there usually is such a meaning and they will probably agree which it is - regardless of how frequent it is.

Another factor that we paid attention to is the contrast between abstract meanings and 'concrete' ones, denoting physical objects and events. Wherever it seemed reasonable, we gave preference to the concrete over the abstract because the concrete meaning is often easier to grasp, and abstract meanings can often be seen as variations on the concrete.

Some dictionaries put the earliest recorded meanings first, so that the present-day meanings are to be found much later in the entry. It should be said at once that this is not a historical dictionary; it is a description of what the language is like at the present time. The user is spared having to read through an account of earlier meanings and etymologies, and will not confuse old and new.

So in this dictionary the first sense is a common one and a central one; also an independent one and if possible it is concrete. The explanation shows what word class is typical of this sense. Then all the other usages of the same word class will normally follow. This organization avoids a lot of repetition because the same framework of explanation can be used again and again.

When the usage changes, so does the wording of the framework and there is a new paragraph. Again the usages are grouped. Examples follow each usage.

This organization means that where a word is used in the same sense but in different word classes, this sense will be given more than once. For example, **clot** 1 is a noun, **clot** 2 is a verb, and **clot** 3 is another noun, quite different from **clot** 1.

Within each paragraph the different senses are grouped together as well as the word allows. Although the frequency of a sense is taken into account, the most important matter within a paragraph is the movement from one sense to another, giving as clear as possible a picture.

Words

A dictionary is organized by putting words in alphabetical order. In the main this is a simple task. There are, however, a number of problems affecting some unusual words and various combinations.

In general, we have stuck to strict alphabetical order of the written form of the word. When a word has more than one pronunciation, like *bow* or *absent*, this is noted at the beginning of the entry. Compounds, inflections or derived forms that merit a separate entry are given in their alphabetical place, and no account is taken of the hyphens or word spaces that are sometimes found in compounds. Phrases are recorded at the word we think the user will probably turn to first, but cross-referenced from other significant words. Technical terms about language, including the apparatus of the extra column, will all be found in alphabetical order, as will common abbreviations, weights and measures and many other items that sometimes appear separately in dictionaries.

What Kind of English?

Any dictionary in one volume, however large, has to make decisions about which words to include and which to exclude, which to mention briefly and which to concentrate on. It has already been pointed out (see *Common Words*, above) that this dictionary gives pride of place to the central core of the language. It is above all a guide to ordinary everyday English.

Technical Terminology

The texts from which this dictionary is derived are nearly all in ordinary everyday English, that any educated person might read or hear. The word list includes many hundreds of words which are technical in origin but which are regularly used in the central vocabulary - words like *hearsay*, *gynaecology*, *debug*. The meanings given are the meanings that are actually used in our ordinary texts and not necessarily what a specialist would say.

This is a tricky point; many words of technical origin in current use have highly specific meanings which are not really accessible to anyone who does not know the subject. They are explained, so to speak, within a scientific or humanistic discipline. If we just wrote out the 'official' explanation our users would hardly be helped at all. Most would have great

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difficulty in understanding the explanation; if they managed to understand it they might very well find that it was being used by a non-specialist in a much more general sense.

Hence we have explained the technical words according to the way we use them in ordinary English, and we have kept the explanations as simple as possible. If you need a lot of technical terms, you can find them in the many specialized dictionaries that are compiled by experts in each field. There are also dictionaries with a large number of headwords like *Collins English Dictionary*.

Social Variety

The texts in our collection come from as wide a range of sources as possible, within what we feel is 'ordinary English'. Each text has to be about something, and we have taken account of the subject matter in every instance. Where the sense or usage seems to be restricted to a particular subject area, this is mentioned in the text. For example, *chromosome* is called a technical word and *clarion call* is called a literary expression.

On some occasions you will find an explanation that is not followed by an example. This often tells you that it is not a very important word. But sometimes it indicates that we do not recommend you to use it without assistance. It is there to help you in reading and understanding but there are difficult features of its usage which make it unsafe to use without further information.

We have also made recommendations on matters of formality, politeness and rudeness in English. It is the job of a dictionary to record the way a language is used, and we have done this.

Formality differs between spoken and written English. An expression which is quite normal in conversation might look very informal if it was written down; so *formal* and *informal* are just general guides, and you can use more informal English in speech than in writing.

Anything said to be rude, offensive, obscene or insulting should be treated with great care. Unless you are absolutely sure of how to use such words and phrases, you should avoid them. Users of English today are quite open and straightforward in their language, and will use words which would have shocked people only a few years ago. However, it is an area of usage where great skill and judgment are required for effective use. Nowadays sex and religion are often joked about in most social groups, but racist talk is very offensive, and sexist talk irritates some people.

Warnings are given whenever we feel they are necessary, so please be very careful to avoid these words and phrases.

Geographical Variety

English is the most widely used language in the world. It is the native and often the only language of people in Britain, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many other territories. It is the main second language of many Commonwealth countries and is learned to a high level by millions more people who do not use it in their immediate society, but need it because of their international connections in trade, research, politics etc.

A single volume cannot hope to do justice to the immense variety that is found in modern English. There are now whole dictionaries of regional varieties, like the *Macquarie Dictionary of Australian English*. But this dictionary, originating in Britain, inevitably tends towards a British variety of English. It tries to

avoid British usages which are not international. Equally, aspects of American, Canadian or Australian English which are distinctive to these regions have been left out, but those which are familiar to the international community have been recorded. So *automobile* is said to be used especially in American English, but there is no restriction on *automat*. The result of this is a description of a form of English which is widely used and usable throughout the world.

Within Britain, there is a bewildering variety of accents and dialects, and again we have had to work out an appropriate policy for this dictionary. The principle we have followed is that a user of this dictionary will expect to have a statement about a word which is as simple and clear as it can possibly be made. There should be as few ifs and buts as possible. Hence we do not record all the variety, and more space is made available for words that can be used anywhere. There is a good range of specialist texts on accents and dialects of British English, so someone with a particular query can probably find the answer to it in a good library. In this book we try to describe a norm of usage which will be accepted as normal by large numbers of people.

There is a separate statement on pronunciation on page xii. The long tradition of English teaching throughout the world has settled on a so-called 'variety' of English called Received Pronunciation or RP. This may be felt nowadays as a slightly dated variety arising from an elitist view of a language, but it is still the best documented variety and entirely serviceable as a model.

Correctness

With regard to usage, correctness and related matters of style in the wording of the dictionary entries we have adopted a slightly conservative position. Many of the newer features of contemporary English may have a short life, and should not be given a place in the language that implies permanence. Many established features are not much used by younger people but are still thought to be available to most competent speakers. These are our judgments. We hope that the language presented in this book is above all reliable, not dated nor markedly avant-garde, nor unusual to the kind of person we think of as an average user.

Even this cautious reflection of modern usage will come as a surprise to many readers who are accustomed to following an older style of writing in English. For example, there is no attempt to avoid splitting infinitives. It is a regular feature of current speech and writing and we believe that it is now time to accept that the balance of usage is in favour of stylistic freedom in this instance. Also, we regularly refer to the indefinite pronouns such as *someone* by the words *they*, *them*, *their* because *he* and *she* are restricted to male and female referents respectively. We have abandoned the convention whereby *he* was held to refer to both men and women. This is done for several reasons; it is quite natural in speech; it is a very sensitive matter for those who have pointed out the built-in sexism of English; the 'singularity' of the indefinite pronouns is not as marked as the singularity of a common count noun.

These policies are representative of a number of small steps towards accepting some of the facts of everyday usage. We do not expect they will be welcomed by everyone, but would suggest that any who find them - as a whole - unacceptable are not really engaging with current English.

This brings up the question of usage and authority.