

W2 Dictionaries

W2-a Unabridged Dictionaries

Unabridged dictionaries contain the most complete collection of words, meanings, and historical derivations. The definitive dictionary of the English language is the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*. A historical dictionary that gives a complete history of each word (including many obsolete words), the *OED* contains some 620,000 entries. The dictionary is currently available as a twenty-volume print edition, on CD-ROM, or on-line. If your college or university library does not house the print version of the *OED*, you can subscribe to *OED Online*, which is updated quarterly. (The Web addresses of *OED Online* and abridged on-line dictionaries are listed in Table W-1. Some of the abridged on-line dictionaries are greatly simplified versions of their print counterparts.) A third edition of the *OED* is being prepared for publication in 2010.

The largest contemporary dictionary is *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*. Containing over 472,000 entries, this one-volume dictionary is strictly descriptive—as opposed to prescriptive—in its approach to usage issues. The single-volume *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* contains 315,000 entries and is also available on CD-ROM.

There are variant spellings among the Canadian dictionaries as well. Here are a few:

NELSON	GAGE	CDN. OXFORD
acknowledgment	acknowledgment	acknowledgement
aging	ageing	aging
analyze	analyse	analyze
appendixes	appendixes	appendices
bureaux	bureaus	bureaus
enroll	enrol	enrol
focused	focussed	focused
fulfill	fulfil	fulfill
mustache	mustache	moustache
skepticism	scepticism	skepticism

W3-e Spell Checkers

The spell checker, a standard feature of word processors, allows you to check your document's spelling and grammar. Many writers have found that this word-processing tool is of limited use. A spell checker does not

alert you to certain typographical errors (such as *causal* when you mean to say *casual*) or to your own errors in grammar (such as *they're* when the grammatically correct word is *their*).

For Canadian writers, the spell checker has another drawback. The default setting of most spell checkers is based on American spelling. If you use Canadian spelling in your documents, you must build a customized dictionary so that the spell checker does not reject such Canadian/British spellings as *colour* and *traveller*.

Do not rely too heavily on your spell checker. It can be useful in the preliminary stages of the editing process, but it should never be used as a substitute for careful proofreading.

TABLE W-1 On-line Dictionaries

<i>American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language</i>	www.bartleby.com/61
<i>Cambridge Dictionary of American English</i>	www.dictionary.cambridge.org
<i>Cambridge Dictionary of International English</i>	www.dictionary.cambridge.org
<i>Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms</i>	www.dictionary.cambridge.org
<i>Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs</i>	www.dictionary.cambridge.org
<i>The Macquarie Dictionary</i>	www.macnet.mq.edu.au
<i>Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary</i>	www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm
<i>Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus</i>	www.m-w.com/thesaurus.htm
<i>Newbury House Online Dictionary</i>	http://nhd.heinle.com
<i>OED Online</i>	www.oed.com
<i>Random House Webster's College Dictionary</i>	www.funkandwagnalls.com
<i>Rogets II: The New Thesaurus</i>	www.bartleby.com/62

W2-b Abridged Dictionaries

For daily use, an abridged or "abbreviated" dictionary is an essential writer's tool. Abridged dictionaries are both affordable and portable, and offer the practical assistance college and university writers need. Here are some popular abridged dictionaries:

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed. (200,000 entries)

Canadian Oxford Dictionary (130,000 entries)

Concise Oxford Dictionary, 10th ed. (220,000 entries)

Gage Canadian Dictionary, rev. ed. (140,000 entries)

Funk and Wagnall's Canadian College Dictionary, rev. ed. (155,000 entries)

ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary of the English Language (150,000 entries)

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. (215,000 entries)

Any one of the Canadian abridged dictionaries listed below will satisfy most needs. The spelling preferences in each of these dictionaries reflect the Canadian practice of blending British and American preferences (*colour, analyze*). (See W3-d.)

1. *ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary of the English Language* (1997). Users of this dictionary will encounter new vocabulary (*infomercial, photo radar, zero tolerance*), words and phrases that are distinctively Canadian (*Ski-Doo, last spike, muskeg*), and a wide range of supplementary material.
2. *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (1998). This dictionary is the result of an exhaustive review of Canadian databases by five Canadian lexicographers. Among the entries are 2000 Canadianisms.
3. *Gage Canadian Dictionary* (1996). This revised and expanded edition has 30 percent more content than the 1983 *Gage Canadian Dictionary*. Of particular value to ESL learners is the dictionary's emphasis on idioms and illustrative phrases and sentences.

W2-c Specialized Dictionaries

If your abridged dictionary does not contain the word or term you are looking for, you may have to consult a specialized dictionary. Specialized dictionaries are devoted to specialized or technical vocabulary used in various fields. Such dictionaries exist for law, medicine, music, art, sociology, psychology, computer technology, and many other fields. A Canadian example is the *Pocket Dictionary of Canadian Law* (1995), which contains definitions of over 7000 legal terms drawn primarily from Canadian sources. Here is a sample entry from the *Pocket Dictionary*:

REVIEWABLE ERROR. "...[A]n arbitrator in construing a statutory provision in the course of an arbitration proceeding commits reviewable error if his or her construction is wrong...." *Cape Breton Development Corp. v. U.M.W. District No. 26, Local 4522* (1985), 85 C.L.L.C. 14,041 at 12,222, 68 N.S.R. (2d) 181, 159 A.P.R. 181 (T.D.), MacIntosh J.

As this entry makes clear, the *Pocket Dictionary* is written specifically for lawyers and law students.

W2-d Dictionaries of Usage

The usage notes in your abridged dictionary will not cover every usage issue that arises. Two classic dictionaries of usage you can consult are H.W. Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (revised by Ernest Gowers in 1965) and Jacques Barzun's *Modern American Usage*. The first major revision of Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, edited by R.W. Burchfield, was published in 1996. Some linguistic observers are dismayed by the fact that this third edition is far less prescriptive than Fowler's original.

A noteworthy Canadian usage dictionary is the *Guide to Canadian English Usage* (Oxford University Press, 1997). The guide's 1750 cross-referenced entries are based on illustrative examples drawn from the Strathy corpus of Canadian English, which contains 12 million words of contemporary Canadian English. In addition to addressing specifically Canadian usage issues such as *Aboriginal peoples* and *Quebec English*, the entries give advice on points of grammar, problematic expressions, style, pronunciation, punctuation, and inclusive language. The authors are highly permissive when it comes to disputed usages; they endorse, for example, *presently* in the sense of "at present," *convince* and *persuade* as synonyms, and *hopefully* as a sentence adverb. More prescriptive Canadian alternatives to the Oxford guide include the second edition of *Editing Canadian English* (2000) and the latest editions of *The Canadian Style: A Guide to Writing and Editing* (1997) and *The Globe and Mail Style Book: A Guide to Language and Usage* (1998).

W2-e The Thesaurus

A dictionary of synonyms and antonyms, called a thesaurus, is an invaluable aid when you find yourself overusing a certain word and require an alternative. *Roget's International Thesaurus* and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus* are particularly well known.

A sample entry illustrates the potential dangers of using a thesaurus. If you look up *pair* in the index of *Roget's*, you will be guided to synonyms listed under the keywords *similar*, *combine*, *couple*, and *marry*. Accompanying each suggested keyword is a corresponding word-list number that you use to locate the keyword list and possible synonyms. The number accompanying the keyword *similar* leads you to this entry:

Category number **Key-word** **Part of speech** **Synonyms**

17. **Similarity**.—**N.** similarity, resemblance, likeness, similitude, semblance; affinity, approximation, parallelism; parity; agreement &c. 23; analogy, -logicalness; correspondence, equality &c.

connatural-ness, -ity; brotherhood, family likeness.

alliteration, rhyme, pun

repetition &c. 104, sameness &c. (*identity*) 13; uniformity &c. 16. analogue; the like; match, pendant, fellow, companion, pair, mate, twin, double, counterpart, brother, sister; one's second self, alter ego, chip off the old block, *par nobile fratrum*, *Arcades ambo*, birds of a feather, *et hoc genus omne*.

parallel; simile; type &c. (*metaphor*) 521; image &c. (*representation*) 554; photograph; close -, striking -, speaking-, speaking -, faithful &c. *adj.* - likeness, - resemblance.

V. be -similar &c. *adj.*; look like, resemble, bear resemblance, favour; savour -, smack- of; approximate; parallel, match, rhyme with; take after; imitate &c. 19; run in pairs.

render -similar &c. *adj.*; assimilate, approximate, bring near; connaturalize, make alike; rhyme, pun.

Adj. similar; resembling &c. v.; like alike; twin.

analog-ous, -ical; parallel, of a piece; such as, so.

connatural, congenetic, allied to; corresponding, cognate; skin to &c. (*consanguineous*) 11.

approximate, much the same, near, close, something like, such like; a show of; mock, pseudo, simulating, representing.

exact &c. (true) 494; lifelike, faithful, realistic; true to -nature, - the life; the -very image - picture- of; for all the world like, *comme deux gouttes d'eau*; as like as -two peas, - it can stare; *instar omnium*, cast in the same mould, ridiculously like.

As you can see, an entry in a thesaurus can lead you in many different directions. When using a thesaurus, make sure that the word you choose expresses your meaning exactly. If you are not sure of the meaning of the alternative word, look it up in a dictionary before you use it. Resist the temptation to use exotic words; your readers will be confused if the words you select fail to convey your intended meaning.

W2-f Using a Dictionary

A sample entry, taken from the *ITP Nelson Canadian Dictionary*, illustrates the various components of a dictionary entry.

Spelling and syllabication **Pronunciation** **Parts of speech** **Inflected forms**

Definitions as a noun

pair (pâr) *n.*, *pl.* **pair** or **pairs**. **1.** Two corresponding persons or items, similar in form or function and matched or associated. **2.** One object composed of two joined similar parts dependent upon each other: a *pair of pliers*. **3.a.** Two persons joined in marriage or engaged. **b.** Two persons who have something in common and are considered together. **c.** Two mated animals. **d.** Two animals joined together in work. **4.** *Games.* Two playing cards of the same denomination. **5.** Two members of a deliberative body in opposition on a given issue who offset each other's vote by abstention. **6.** *Chem.* An electron pair. - *v.*

**Definitions
as a verb**

paired, pair-ing, pairs. – *tr.* **1.** To arrange in sets of two; couple. **2.** To join in a pair; mate. **3.** To provide a partner for. – *intr.* **1.** To form pairs or a pair. **2.** To join in marriage; mate. [ME < OFr. *paire* < Lat. *paria*, equals, pl. of *pār*, a pair < *pār*, equal. See **per**²⁷.]

Usage

Usage Note: *Pair* as a noun can be followed by a singular or plural verb. The singular is always used when *pair* denotes the set taken as a single entity: *This pair of shoes is on sale.* A plural verb is used when the members are considered as individuals: *The pair are working together.* After a number other than one, *pair* can be either singular or plural, but the plural is now more common: *She bought six pairs (or pair) of stockings.*

If you compare this entry with the entry for *pair* in *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, you will see certain differences in both the format and the content.

Spelling Pronunciation Parts of speech

**Definitions
as a noun**

pair / per / *n.* & *v.* • *n.* **1** a set of two persons or things used together or regarded as a unit (*a pair of scoundrels; a pair of gloves; a pair of eyes*). **2** an article e.g. scissors, trousers, or tights, consisting of two joined or corresponding parts not used separately. **3 a** a dating, engaged, cohabiting, or married couple. **b** a mated couple of animals. **4** two horses harnessed side by side (*a couach and pair*). **5** the second member of a pair in relation to the first (*cannot find its pair*). **6** two playing cards of the same denomination. **7 Parl. a** either or both of two members of a legislative assembly on opposite sides absenting themselves from voting by mutual arrangement. **b** an agreement to do this. **8** (in *pl.*) = PAIRS SKATING. **9** (in *pl.*) a sporting event, e.g. in synchronized swimming or rowing, performed by teams of two. • *v.tr.* & *intr.* **1** (often foll. by *off*) arrange or be arranged in couples. **2** match or be matched together (*pair a wool vest with a silk shirt*). **3 a** join or be joined in marriage, close friendship, etc. **b** (of animals) mate. **4 Parl.** form a pair (see sense 7 of *n.*). □ **in pairs** in twos. [Middle English from Old French *paire* from Latin *paria* neuter pl. of *par* equal]

**Definitions
as a verb**

THE GAME OF DICTIONARY

An entertaining way to learn how to use a dictionary while at the same time expanding your vocabulary is to play a game called Dictionary. To set up the game, all you need is a good dictionary, paper and pens, and some interested players. Here are the instructions:

1. The players take turns choosing a word from the dictionary. Establish at the outset how long the game will run—that is, how many turns each participant will have. The length of the game will depend on such factors as the number of participants.
2. When it is your turn to choose a word from the dictionary, select a word you are unfamiliar with and ask your fellow players if they know the word. If one or more of them do, repeat the process until you find a word that no one knows.
3. As you write down the dictionary definition of the word on a piece of paper, the other players write down what they think sounds like a believable definition of the word. Each person tries to make the other players think his or her definition is correct.
4. Collect all the definitions (including the dictionary definition) and, after shuffling them, identify each with a number. Read aloud each definition, announcing its number at the outset. After the last definition has been presented, the players write down the number of the definition they think is the correct one.
5. The person who selected the word from the dictionary receives one point for every person who does not select the dictionary definition. Other players get one point for every person who thought their definition was the correct one. Players who picked the dictionary definition as the correct definition earn two points.
6. The game proceeds until each player has the predetermined number of turns at choosing a word from the dictionary. The player with the most points at the end of the game is declared the winner.