

## Using an online monolingual dictionary: The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)

There are now a large number of monolingual dictionaries available free online including:

1. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>
2. Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
3. Merriam-Webster <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>
4. Collins Dictionary <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english>
5. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English <https://www.ldoceonline.com//>
6. Dictionary.com <https://www.dictionary.com/>

Although all of these resources provide similar information about English words, they each have their own unique features so it would be a good idea to compare them and choose one which suits your needs. In the following tasks, we will examine some of the characteristics of the OALD to enable you to use a monolingual dictionary effectively.

### A. Some useful features in the OALD

1. Search word

2. Headword & part of speech

3. British (BrE) & American English (NAme) pronunciation

4. Different meanings of headword numbered (4 meanings here)

5. Definition for the particular meaning given here

6. Whether verbs are transitive or intransitive shown here

7. Etymology or word origin shown here

8. More example sentences shown here

9. Idioms or phrasal verbs including headword shown here

10. Prepositions or adverbs normally used with the word – if optional, they are shown in (brackets)

11. Other results for the search word here

12. Example sentences provided for each meaning

The screenshot shows the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries interface for the word 'mortgage'. The page includes a search bar at the top with 'ENGLISH' selected and 'mortgage' entered. The main content area displays the word 'mortgage' as a noun, with its phonetic transcription in British English (BrE) and American English (NAme). A definition is provided, followed by a list of collocations such as 'to apply for/take out/pay off a mortgage', 'mortgage rates', and 'a mortgage on the house'. Below the definition are sections for 'Wordfinder' (listing related words like 'home' and 'loan'), 'Collocations', 'Culture', and 'Oxford Collocations Dictionary'. A sidebar on the right contains 'Other Links' (iWriter, iSpeaker, My Wordlists, Resources, Word lists) and 'Other results' (listing related terms like 'mortgage verb', 'mortgage bond', 'endowment', etc.).

13. Word stress indicated by a small vertical line

14. Information on register etc. provided by labels

15. Semantically related words given in 'Wordfinder'

16. Cultural background information on the word given in 'Culture'

17. Important collocations used with the word shown, separated by a slash (/)

18. Other important collocations associated with the topic shown, separated by a slash (/)

## Notes

1. The search word is typed into the search box. Note that 'ENGLISH' tells us that we are searching in the English dictionary (other types of dictionary are also available).
2. The headword is shown in the blue banner, along with the part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc.).
3. The pronunciation of the word is given in phonemic script (e.g. /pi:l/) and can also be heard by clicking on the speaker icon. The pronunciation in both British (BrE) and American (NAme) English are provided – these are sometimes different. Note that the syllable stress in the word is indicated by a small vertical line (see #13), with the stressed syllable coming immediately *after* the line.
4. Search words often have multiple meanings and these are numbered (e.g. the verb *peel* has 4 different meanings while the noun *mortgage* only has one).
5. A definition of the word is given for each individual meaning – check that you are looking at the correct sense of your search word.

6. Whether verbs are transitive or intransitive (or both) is shown in square brackets for each meaning. A transitive verb requires an object (e.g. John threw **the ball**; not ~~John threw~~) whereas an intransitive verb makes sense without an object (e.g. the sun rose).
7. 'Word origin' provides some background information on the etymology (history) of the search word. English words are often derived from Latin, Greek or French, for example.
8. Extra examples are provided if you need to check how to use the search word appropriately in a sentence.
9. Idioms usually have a figurative, or non-literal, meaning (e.g. 'Keep your eyes peeled' means 'look carefully'). With phrasal verbs (verb + adverb/preposition) the verb sometimes keeps its meaning and the particle adds or modifies it (e.g. peel off; 'off' = to another place). However, sometimes the meaning changes completely (e.g. 'I picked up French' = to learn without intention).
10. Words are often followed by particular prepositions or adverbs (e.g. peel (something) **away/off/back**). Pay attention to these particles for advice on how to use search words appropriately in a sentence – be careful, the particles sometimes change the meaning of the verb (e.g. We used the paint vs. We used **up** the paint).
11. The search word may have more than one part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb) – check the 'Other results' section if you are looking for a different part of speech from the one shown.
12. Always check the example sentences to confirm that you have the correct meaning of the search word and that you can use it appropriately in your own writing.
13. The small vertical line shows us that the stress is on the first syllable in '**m**ortgage' (notice also that the 't' sound is silent here).
14. Labels such as *informal* provide extra information about the search word:
  - i. *Formal* = expressions used in serious or official language (e.g. admonish)
  - ii. *Informal* = expressions used between friends or in relaxed situations (e.g. dodgy)
  - iii. *Approving* = expressions that have a positive meaning (e.g. slim)
  - iv. *Disapproving* = expressions that have a negative meaning (e.g. skinny)
  - v. *Figurative* = language used in a non-literal way (e.g. You are my sunshine).
  - vi. *Taboo* = language considered offensive or shocking (e.g. bloody)
  - vii. *Slang* = very informal language, sometimes limited to a particular group of people, like teenagers or prisoners (e.g. dosh = money).
  - viii. *Humorous* = expressions meant to be funny (e.g. ankle-biter = a child).
  - ix. *North American/British/Australian English* = language used in particular countries (e.g. g'day = Australian & New Zealand English).
  - x. *Dialect* = language used in particular regions of a country (e.g. nowt = nothing in Yorkshire, England).
15. 'Wordfinder' provides semantically related words (connected to the same topic) to the search word (e.g. *mortgage* belongs to a lexical set around the topic of loans: credit, debt, lend, overdraft, interest, etc.). This can be useful if you are looking for natural ways to write about a particular topic in an essay.
16. 'Culture' provides relevant cultural background information on a search word. For example, *mortgage* might be unfamiliar to people from Islamic countries where paying interest on loans (*riba*) is forbidden.
17. Collocation refers to the ways that particular words tend to occur together. For example, we can say 'dry white wine' but not 'wet pink wine': *dry* and *white* collocate with *wine* but *wet* and *pink* do not. Common collocations associated with the search word are provided, separated by slashes (e.g. red /rosé /white wine).

18. 'Collocations' provides other common collocations for semantically related words to the search word. For example, *mortgages* are connected with buying, selling or renting houses and you can find useful expressions in this section, such as 'put down a deposit', 'put your house on the market' or 'extend the lease'.

### B. Familiarization tasks

- Compare the search results from *three* of the dictionaries listed above for the words below. How are the words pronounced? How many possible meanings do they have? How are they used in a sentence? What synonym or near synonym could replace the words in a sentence?
  - Queue (noun) 2 or 3 meanings; = line
  - Suspect (verb) 3 meanings; = assume; imagine
  - Sunken (adjective) 2 or 3 meanings; = dented; depressed; submerged

What differences do you notice between the dictionaries? Which online dictionary do you prefer and why? *Answers will vary*

- Is the pronunciation of *leisure* the same in British and American English? Which syllable is stressed? Can we make the noun plural? *Pronunciation differs; 1<sup>st</sup> syllable stressed; noun is uncountable so there is no plural form*
- How many meanings does the verb *bank* have? Which meaning in the dictionary describes the image below? How would you describe this image in a sentence?



*8 nouns + 5 verbs e.g. The plane banked gently to the right.*

- |              |          |             |           |
|--------------|----------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. equipment | 2. allot | 3. alive    | 4. arrive |
| 5. overwhelm | 6. deem  | 7. building |           |

Use the online OALD to decide which word in the box above is:

- A countable noun = *building*
  - An uncountable noun = *equipment*
  - An intransitive verb = *arrive*
  - A transitive verb that takes 2 objects = *allot (allot s/th to s/b)*
  - A verb that is not usually used in the progressive form (-ing) = *deem*
  - An adjective that only follows a verb = *alive e.g. stay alive*
  - A verb that is usually used in the passive form = *overwhelm e.g. To be overwhelmed by s/th*
- What are the origins of the word *sandwich*?  
*4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Sandwich (an English nobleman) ate them to avoid leaving the gaming table.*

6. 

1. ice	2. tree	3. bullet	4. butter
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Use the online OALD to complete these idioms, using the words in the box:

- i. Bite the **bullet** – to accept something difficult or unpleasant.
  - ii. Break the **ice** – to make people feel more relaxed in an uncomfortable situation.
  - iii. **Butter** someone up – to say nice things to someone in order to get what you want.
  - iv. Barking up the wrong **tree** – to have the wrong idea about a situation.
7. Use the online OALD to correct the errors (shown in *italics*) in the following sentences:
- i. I was angry *with* my boss because he was opposed *to* a staff pay rise.
  - ii. If you are good *at* languages, you might want to apply *for* a job with a translation company.
  - iii. She was devoted *to* her husband and cared *for* him deeply.
8. Complete the parts of speech for *excite*:  
 Verb = excite; noun = **excitement** or **excitability**; adjective = **excited** or **excitable** or **exciting**; adverb = **excitedly**
9. Use the online OALD to match the following words with the correct label:

<i>Word</i>	<i>Label</i>
1. Rascal <b>d</b>	a. Formal
2. Spinster <b>f</b>	b. Informal
3. Dosh <b>c</b>	c. Slang (v. informal language used by a specific group)
4. Bitch <b>e</b>	d. Humorous
5. Bonkers <b>b</b>	e. Taboo
6. Terminate <b>a</b>	f. Old-fashioned
7. Howdy! <b>h</b>	g. Literary (used in literature, not normal conversation)
8. Slumber <b>g</b>	h. Dialect (language only used in a specific area)

10. 

1. <del>slender</del>	2. feisty	3. tolerant	4. petite	5. xenophobic
6. squat	7. <del>skinny</del>	8. stubborn	9. famous	10. notorious

Words can have positive or negative *connotations* (ideas carried by a word in addition to its main meaning). Use the online OALD to categorize the adjectives in the box above into pairs with a similar main meaning but either a positive or negative connotation (the first example has been done for you):

**Positive**

*slender*  
*petite*  
*tolerant*  
*famous*  
*feisty*

**Negative**

*skinny*  
*squat*  
*xenophobic*  
*notorious*  
*stubborn*

11. Use the online OALD to search for the word *money* – what expressions can you find to talk about financial difficulties in the ‘Wordfinder’ or ‘Collocations’ sections (e.g. *run out of money*)?

Earn/ make/ amass/ build up/ live on/ spend/ invest/ waste/ use up/ pay in/ pay by

12. Online dictionaries usually show other words that frequently occur with your search word (i.e., their *collocates*) in the example sentences. For this reason, it is a good idea to study any example sentences carefully, to make sure that your word combinations are natural in English. Use the online OALD to find which nouns and verbs below are commonly found together:

**Verb**

1. pay e
2. take d
3. go f
4. break h
5. catch b
6. keep g
7. reach a
8. do c

**Noun**

- a. a decision
- b. fire
- c. someone a favour
- d. some advice
- e. attention
- f. crazy
- g. calm
- h. a promise

- Is it better to search for the verb or the noun to find the answers here?

The noun

**C. Vocabulary notes**

Did you learn any new vocabulary whilst completing these tasks? Keeping a good record of new words or expressions as you discover them will help you develop your English. In your notes, you could include: (i) the word; (ii) pronunciation and word stress; (iii) part of speech (noun, verb, etc.); (iv) a definition; (v) example sentence; (vi) a synonym; (vii) translation.

<b>Word</b>	<b>Pron.</b>	<b>Part of speech</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example sentence</b>	<b>Synonym</b>	<b>Translation</b>
Possession	/pə'zeɪʃn/	Noun	Having or owning something.	He lost all of his possessions in the fire.	Belongings	la posesión