Factsheet

Use a dictionary

Basics

Knowing how to use a dictionary is important for your studies; it can help you in many ways. We will look at this skill below. You might use a bilingual dictionary (it has two languages) or a monolingual dictionary (it has one language). Both types of dictionary have their advantages. Can you think what they might be?

1 Here are some advantages. Next to them, write B for bilingual or M for monolingual:

a It helps you to learn new words while thinking in English, which improves your English. _____

b You can quickly understand the meaning from your own language. _____

c You can find out a lot about a word. _____

2 Here is what one entry in a dictionary looks like:

a b c d

holiday /ˈhɒlədeɪ/ (*noun*) when we do not go to school or work and we are free to relax or go travelling:
I am on holiday in August.
25th December is a public holiday. e

Match the labelled parts of the entry with these words.

_____ pronunciation	_____ definition	_____ headword	_____ type of word	_____ example

The academic context

If you can use a dictionary well, it can be an important study tool which will help your learning and writing of English throughout your academic and working life. It will help you expand your vocabulary, use words correctly and improve your pronunciation.

Key features

In dictionaries:

- Words are entered in alphabetical order. (For example, we look for the word *Sunday* before *sunny* because *d* comes before *n* in the alphabet.)
- You can find the meaning of a word.
- You can check the spelling of a word.
- You will find out what type of word it is.
- You can see example sentences showing how to use the word.
- You will find the word in your own language, if the dictionary is bilingual.

Challenges / difficulties

If your dictionary is a book, rather than an online tool, it can be difficult to go through and find the word you want. However, the more practice you have in looking up words alphabetically, the easier it becomes.

There can be a lot of information about a word, but you can always use a pocket-size dictionary, which just gives you the basic information. A pocket-size dictionary is also easier to carry.

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Learning outcomes

Students who learn this skill will become more independent in their learning because they can look up the meaning of words by themselves. They will improve their English, because knowing how to use a dictionary helps to build up their vocabulary and understanding.

Theory to practice

Practise using your own dictionary. Look up these three words and complete the information about them.

1 **allow**

type of word: _____

definition: _____

examples: _____

_____

_____

2 **investigation**

type of word: _____

definition: _____

examples: _____

_____

_____

3 **trustworthy**

type of word: _____

definition: _____

examples: _____

_____

_____

Compare your answers with a partner. Do you agree? Did you choose the same examples?

Ways to get more practice

Try to make it a habit to always look up unknown words. You will find that this will make you much better at remembering the meaning of words. If you develop a love for your dictionary, you will explore it and learn so many new words!

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