



## 5 Using your dictionary



Good dictionaries can tell you a lot more about a word than just its meaning, including (among other things):

- Synonyms and their differences, e.g. **mislay** and **lose**
- Antonyms (opposites), e.g. **friend** = **enemy/foe**
- Collocations (how words go together), e.g. **auburn** combines only with **hair** (or connected words, e.g. **curls**)
- Pronunciation: this will mean learning some symbols which are different from the letters of the English alphabet.

θ	th in <b>thick</b>	ð	th in <b>then</b>	tʃ	ch in <b>church</b>
ʃ	sh in <b>she</b>	dʒ	j in <b>jam</b>	ʒ	s in <b>pleasure</b>
ŋ	ng in <b>ring</b>	æ	a in <b>bad</b>	o	o in <b>top</b>
ɔː	o in <b>form</b>	ʊ	u in <b>put</b>	ə	a in <b>about</b>
ʌ	u in <b>up</b>	ɜː	i in <b>bird</b>		

Most other symbols look just like ordinary letters of the English alphabet and their pronunciation is not so hard to guess. But check the table given in the index.

- Word stress: often shown by a mark before the syllable to be stressed or by underlining, e.g. **əd'ventʃə/**, **/wɛs tən/**. Make sure you know how your dictionary marks stress.
- Usage: how a word is used and any special grammatical pattern that goes with it, e.g. **suggest** + clause (not an infinitive) – I suggest you ring her right away.
- Whether a word is used for people and/or things. For example, look at this entry for **malignant**:

**ma-lig-nant** /mə'lɪɡnənt/ *adj* 1 (of people or their actions) feeling or showing great desire to harm others; malevolent: a *malignant* slander, attack, threat. 2 (a) (of a tumour) growing uncontrollably, and likely to prove fatal: The growth is not *malignant*. (b) (of diseases) harmful to life.  
 ▷ **ma-lig-nancy** (-nənsɪ) *n* 1 [U] state of being malignant. 2 [C] malignant tumour.  
**ma-lig-nantly** *adv*.

- Word-class (usually abbreviations **n**: noun, **adj**: adjective, etc.), whether a noun is countable or uncountable, and whether a verb is normally transitive (needs an object) or intransitive (doesn't need an object).



Don't forget that most words have more than one meaning. In this example, only the second meaning corresponds to the way **hairy** is used in this sentence:

It was a really **hairy** journey on the mountain road.

**hairy** /'heəri/. **hairier**, **hairiest**. 1 Someone or something that is **hairy** is covered with hair, as ... a plump child with *hairy* legs... a big, *hairy* man. The function of a mammal's *hairy* coat is to insulate the body. 2 If you describe a situation as **hairy**, you mean that it is exciting, worrying, and rather frightening. 2 very informal use, as It got a little *hairy* when we drove him to the station with less than two minutes to spare.

## Exercises

- 5.1** With a *bilingual* dictionary, try a double search: look up a word in your language; the dictionary may give several possibilities in English. Look up each of those possibilities in the English section of the dictionary to see how they translate back into your language. This may help you to separate synonyms.

If you own a dictionary, make a little mark in the margin each time you look a word up. If a word gets three or more marks, it is worth an extra effort to learn it. What other learning techniques are there for dictionaries?

- 5.2** Small, bilingual dictionaries often just give three or four translations for a word you look up, without any explanation. Here are some pictures with translations you might find in such a dictionary. Which ones fit in the sentences? You may need to use a monolingual dictionary.



sofa divan  
couch settee



boots booties  
wellingtons



sailing boat ketch  
dinghy yacht

- 1 Come and sit on the ..... and relax a while.
- 2 She bought a huge, luxury ..... and went off round the world.
- 3 If you're going to stand in the water you should take your .....
- 4 It's not a proper yacht; it's just a tiny little .....

- 5.3** Which definition of *casual* fits which sentence?

<p><b>casual</b> /kæʒjəl/. <b>casuals</b> 1 Something that is casual 1.1 happens or is done by chance or without planning. <i>so Her casual remark caused a political storm...</i> 1.2 a casual meeting. <i>o casually</i>. <i>so...</i> 1.3 a casually acquired object. 1.2 is rather careless and done without much interest. <i>so I had a casual glance at the papers...</i> 2 a casual friendship. <i>o casually</i>. 2 If you are casual, you are, or you pretend to be, calm and not very interested in what is happening or what you are doing. <i>so He tried to appear casual as he asked her to dance...</i> 3 a casual wave. <i>o casually</i></p>	<p><b>ADJ CLASS:</b> 1 accidental <b>ADV VERB:</b> 2 ADV VERB 3 ADV VERB <b>ADJ QUANT:</b> 4 nonchalant, unconcerned <b>ADV VERB:</b></p>	<p><i>so I walked casually into his room. o casualness. so With studied casualness he mentioned it to Hilary.</i> 3 Casual clothes are clothes that are suitable for when you are at home or doing things other than working, but are not suitable for work or formal occasions. <i>so...</i> a casual shirt. • used as a plural noun. <i>so...</i> smart casuals. <i>o casually. so He was dressed casually.</i> 4 Casual work is done for only a short time, and not on a permanent or regular basis. <i>so They employ casual workers to pick the fruit...</i> a casual job.</p>	<p><b>ADV VERB:</b> <b>ADJ CLASS:</b> <b>ADJ:</b> 1 informal • N PLURAL <b>ADV VERB:</b> <b>ADJ CLASS:</b> <b>ADJ:</b> • temporary</p>
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- 1 It was quite a casual outfit, just right for such an informal occasion. (definition no. ....)
- 2 I only said it casually, but it shocked her. (.....)
- 3 I don't get a salary; I'm just a casual. (.....)
- 4 It was just a casual encounter, but it changed my life. (.....)

- 5.4** Pronunciation. What English words are these?

- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 /edʒu'keɪʃən/ ..... | 4 /'lɪbətɪ/ .....  |
| 2 /'pæsपोर्ट/ .....   | 5 /rə'vɪʒən/ ..... |
| 3 /'leɪθ/ .....       | 6 /'brʌdə/ .....   |

- 5.5** In the dictionary entry for *hairy* opposite how many synonyms can you see for the different meanings?

## Unit 5

- 5.2** 1 All the words are possible. Some people feel that **sofa** and **couch** are a bit 'lower class', and that **settee** is the so-called 'refined, middle-class' word. **Divan** could also be used, but its normal British English meaning is a kind of bed with a very thick base. It can also, less commonly, mean a kind of sofa with no back or arms.
- 2 **Luxury** most typically collocates with **yacht**, though **ketch** (a double-masted sailing ship) would also be possible. A **dinghy** is a very small, open boat, hardly suitable for going around the world. **Sailing boat** sounds just too general here, since it covers all types of boats with sails.

- 3 **Wellingtons** is the most likely word, since they are rubber boots designed to keep the water out. **Boots** are any kind of high-sided footwear. **Bootees** suggests a kind of ankle-length shoe, fairly lightweight, usually with fur inside for cold weather, often referring to what babies wear.
- 4 **Dinghy** would be a good word here (see 2 above), though **sailing boat** would also fit, as it's quite general.

**5.3** 1 3    2 1.1    3 4    4 1.1

**5.4** 1 education    2 passport    3 length    4 liberty    5 revision    6 brother