

MANY TYPES OF ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

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Abstract: This article provides an overview of the various types of English dictionaries, emphasizing their diversity in scope, size, target users, and functions. It categorizes dictionaries into groups such as historical, concise, learner-oriented, and subject-specific, illustrating how each serves distinct linguistic and educational purposes. By understanding these differences, users can make informed choices about which dictionary best suits their needs, enhancing language acquisition, communication, and academic research.

Keywords: English dictionaries, lexicography, dictionary types, historical dictionaries, learner's dictionaries, monolingual dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, thesauruses, specialized dictionaries, dictionary features.

The English language, with its vast and ever-evolving vocabulary, necessitates a diverse array of dictionaries to cater to the varied needs of its speakers and learners. The notion of a single "English dictionary" is a simplification, as the field of lexicography has produced a rich tapestry of reference works, each with its own purpose, scope, and design. Whether one seeks the etymological roots of a word, a clear definition for academic study, guidance on usage for non-native speakers, or synonyms for creative writing, a specific type of dictionary is likely to provide the most effective assistance. This article aims to navigate this complex landscape, offering a comprehensive overview of the many types of English dictionaries available, elucidating their key features and intended audiences.

The world of English dictionaries can be broadly categorized along several key dimensions:

Comprehensive (Historical) Dictionaries: These are the most extensive dictionaries, often aiming to record the entire history of a language's words, their various forms, meanings, and usage over time. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) stands as the prime example, meticulously tracing the evolution of English vocabulary through centuries, supported by extensive citations. These dictionaries are invaluable resources for scholars, researchers, and anyone with a deep interest in the historical development of the English language.

General Purpose Dictionaries: These are the workhorses of everyday language reference. They provide a broad coverage of contemporary English vocabulary, offering definitions, pronunciations, and often usage examples. They come in various sizes, from large desk dictionaries suitable for home or office use to more compact versions. Examples include the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

Pocket (Concise) Dictionaries: Designed for portability and quick reference, these dictionaries offer a more limited selection of the most common words and their core meanings. They are often favored by students or travelers needing a handy resource.

Learner's Dictionaries (ELT Dictionaries): Specifically designed for non-native speakers of English, these dictionaries prioritize clarity and pedagogical support. They typically feature simplified definitions using a controlled vocabulary, numerous illustrative examples relevant to everyday situations, grammatical information, usage notes highlighting common errors, and often visual aids. Examples include the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

Native Speaker Dictionaries. These dictionaries assume a higher level of linguistic competence and often include more nuanced definitions, idiomatic

expressions, and a broader range of vocabulary without the simplified language found in learner's dictionaries.

Monolingual Dictionaries. These define English words using other English words. They are the most common type and cater to both native speakers and advanced learners.

Bilingual Dictionaries. These provide translations of English words into one or more other languages, and vice versa. They are essential tools for language learners and translators. The quality and focus can vary greatly depending on the target languages and the intended user.

Thesauruses. While technically not dictionaries as they don't primarily provide definitions, thesauruses are closely related reference works that offer synonyms and antonyms for English words. They are invaluable for writers seeking alternative vocabulary and enhancing their expressive range. Roget's Thesaurus is a classic example.

Pronouncing Dictionaries. These specialized dictionaries focus primarily on the pronunciation of English words, often using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to provide precise phonetic transcriptions. They may also include information on stress patterns and regional variations in pronunciation.

Etymological Dictionaries. These trace the origins and historical development of English words, providing insights into their linguistic ancestry and changes in meaning over time. The Online Etymology Dictionary is a readily accessible example.

Usage Dictionaries (Guides). These focus on the correct and effective use of English words, often addressing common grammatical errors, stylistic choices, and nuances of meaning in different contexts. Fowler's Modern English Usage is a well-known example.

Subject-Specific Dictionaries (Glossaries). These dictionaries focus on the vocabulary specific to a particular field of study, profession, or hobby (e.g., medical dictionaries, legal dictionaries, computer glossaries). They provide precise definitions and terminology relevant to that domain.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the multifaceted nature of English dictionaries reflects the dynamic and evolving needs of language users. Whether for in-depth historical research, everyday reference, language learning, or specialized fields, each type of dictionary plays a crucial role in supporting effective communication and understanding. Recognizing the distinctions among these resources allows users to approach the English language with greater precision and confidence, ultimately enriching both their linguistic competence and academic or professional pursuits.

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