

# Unit 1

## Using a Dictionary

This unit is going to talk about various types of information you can find in a dictionary and how to use them correctly. The information presented in this unit is based on the traditional print dictionaries. Once the learners know how to use them, they can adapt it to other forms of dictionary available at the time such as electronic dictionaries.

### Part I: Information Provided in a Dictionary

A dictionary does not only provide us with meanings of words, but it also gives us other useful information about those words. In this part, you are going to learn what is included in a dictionary so that you can make use of those pieces of information.

#### 1. Headwords

The first word at the beginning of the entry or the set of information of a word is called headword. It gives us the usual spelling of the word. (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: ix)

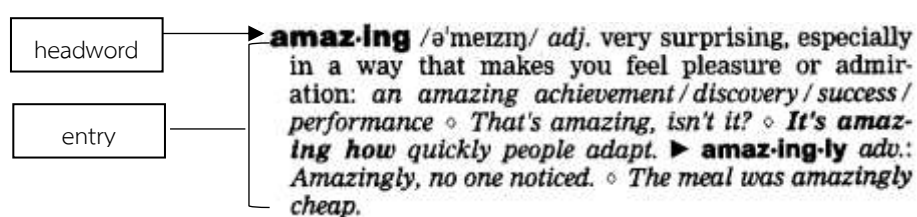


Figure 1.1 A headword and its entry

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 38)

Headwords are arranged in alphabetical order. For example, you will find the headword ‘advice’ before ‘balance’ because the letter A comes before the letter B. According to the same rule, you will find ‘bookbinder’ before ‘bookcase’, followed by ‘book club’, ‘bookend’, and ‘bookie’ respectively.

**book-binder** /'bʊkbændə(r)/ *noun* a person whose job is fastening the pages of books together and putting covers on them ► **book-binding** *noun* [U]  
**book-case** /'bʊkkeɪs/ *noun* a piece of furniture with shelves for keeping books on  
**'book club** *noun* an organization that sells books cheaply to its members  
**book-end** /'bʊkɛnd/ *noun* [usually pl.] one of a pair of objects used to keep a row of books upright  
**bookie** /'bʊki/ *noun (informal)* = BOOKMAKER

Figure 1.2 Alphabetically arranged headwords

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 140)

Exercise 1: Arrange the following words into alphabetical order.

deadline, motion, lion, holiday, bless, movie, blister, link, dice, blench, listen, division, deal, like, mouth, blind, divide, hay, mother, hoist, move, heat, blight, life

- |          |           |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1) ..... | 7) .....  | 13) ..... | 19) ..... |
| 2) ..... | 8) .....  | 14) ..... | 20) ..... |
| 3) ..... | 9) .....  | 15) ..... | 21) ..... |
| 4) ..... | 10) ..... | 16) ..... | 22) ..... |
| 5) ..... | 11) ..... | 17) ..... | 23) ..... |
| 6) ..... | 12) ..... | 18) ..... | 24) ..... |

## 2. Guide Words

The words on the top left and the top right of each set of the pages are called guide words. These words help us find words we are looking for more quickly because they tell us what words are likely to be on each page. The one on the top left shows the first word on that page and the other one on the top right is the last word on that page as you can see from Figure 1.3 below.



Figure 1.3 Guide words

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 66-67)

From Figure 1.3, if you are looking for the word ‘assist’, you can tell right away that it must be listed somewhere on this set of pages because it is alphabetically between the word ‘assessment’ and ‘asteroid’. On the other hand, if you are looking for the word ‘athlete’, you can immediately turn to the next page.

## 3. Pronunciations

How to pronounce words correctly is shown in a dictionary by using phonetic symbols. Those who are not accustomed to these symbols may check the sound from a pronunciation table which is usually placed at the beginning part of most dictionaries. If a word can be pronounced in more than one way, all possible pronunciations will be given in its entry as you can see from Figure 1.4.

**ad-ver-tise-ment** /əd'vɜ:zɪsmənt; AmE ˌædvər'taɪz/  
*noun* **1** [C] (also *informal ad*) (BrE also **ad-vert**) ~ (for sth) a notice, picture or film telling people about a product, job or service: *Put an advertisement in the local paper to sell your car.*—see also CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS **2** [C] (BrE also **ad-vert**) ~ for sth an example of sth that shows its good qualities: *Dirty streets and homelessness are no advertisement for a prosperous society.* **3** [U] the act of advertising sth and making it public

Figure 1.4 Pronunciations

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 20)

Exercise 2: Look at the excerpted parts of *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* and write down the words that can be pronounced in more than one way.

**bold** /bəʊld; AmE bould/ *adj.* (**bold-er, bold-est**) **1** (of people or behaviour) brave and confident; not afraid to say what you feel or to take risks: *It was a bold move on their part to open a branch of the business in*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 137)

**back-ache** /'bækeɪk/ *noun* [U, C] a continuous pain in the back: (BrE) *to have backache / a backache* ◊ (AmE) *to have a backache*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 81)

**block** /blɒk; AmE blɑ:k/ *noun, verb*

■ *noun*

**SOLID MATERIAL** **1** [C] a large piece of a solid material that is square in shape and usually has flat sides: *a block of ice / concrete / stone* ◊ *a chopping block* (= for

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 127)

**busk** /bʌsk/ *verb* [V] (*informal, especially BrE*) to perform music in a public place and ask for money from people passing by

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 171)

**bronze** /brɒnz; AmE brɑ:nz/ *noun, adj.*

■ *noun* **1** [U] a dark reddish-brown metal made by mixing COPPER and tin: *a bronze statue* ◊ *a figure cast in bronze* **2** [U] a dark reddish-brown colour, like bronze **3** [C] a work of art made of bronze, for example a statue: *a fine collection of bronzes* **4** [C, U] = BRONZE MEDAL

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 159)

**bliz-zard** /'blɪzəd; AmE -zərd/ *noun* **1** a SNOWSTORM with very strong winds: *blizzard conditions* **2** (*written*) a large quantity of things that may seem to be attacking you: *a blizzard of documents*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 127)

**bot-tle** /'bɒtl; AmE 'bɑ:tl/ *noun, verb*

■ **noun 1** [C] a glass or plastic container, usually round with straight sides and a narrow neck, used especially for storing liquids: *a wine / beer / milk bottle* ◊

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 143)

**blob** /blɒb; AmE blɑ:b/ *noun* a small amount or drop of sth, especially a liquid; a small area of colour: *a blob of ink* ◊ *a pink blob*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 127)

- 1) .....
- 2) .....
- 3) .....
- 4) .....
- 5) .....
- 6) .....

#### 4. Spellings

If a word has two different spellings for British English and American English, both spellings will be shown in the word's entry as in Figure 1.5. Also if a word is an irregular verb or noun, its irregular form will be given in the entry as in Figure 1.6 and Figure 1.7.

**fa-vour-ite** (BrE) (AmE **fa-vor-ite**) /'feɪvərɪt/ *adj., noun*  
 ■ **adj.** liked more than others of the same kind: *It's one of my favourite movies.* ◊ *Who is your favourite writer?*  
**IDM** **sb's favourite 'son** a performer, politician, sports player, etc., who is popular where they were born

Figure 1.5 Different British English and American English spellings

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 485)

**draw** /drɔː/ *verb, noun*  
 ■ *verb* (**drew** /druː/ **drawn** /drɔːn/) **MAKE PICTURES** **1** to make pictures, or a picture of sth, with a pencil, pen or chalk (but not paint): [V] *You draw beautifully.* ◊ [VN] *to draw a picture / diagram / graph* ◊ *She drew a house.* ◊ *He drew a circle in the sand with a stick.* ◊ (figurative) *The report drew a grim picture of inefficiency and corruption.*

Figure 1.6 Irregular verb spellings

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 401)

**child** /tʃaɪld/ *noun* (pl. **chil-dren** /'tʃɪldrən/) **1** a young human being who is not yet an adult: *a child of three / a three-year-old child* ◊ *men, women and children* ◊ *an unborn child* ◊ *not suitable for young children* ◊ *I lived in London as a child.* ◊ *a child star*—see also **BRAINCHILD**, **LATCHKEY CHILD**, **SCHOOLCHILD** **2** a son or daughter of any age: *They have three grown-up*

Figure 1.7 Irregular plural noun spellings

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 215)

Exercise 3: Look at the excerpted parts of *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* below. Write down the words that can be spelled in more than one way with their alternative spelling.

**col-our** (BrE) (AmE **color**) /'kɒlə(r)/ *noun, verb*  
 ■ *noun*  
**RED, GREEN, etc.** **1** [C, U] the appearance that things have that results from the way in which they reflect light. Red, orange and green are colours: *What's your favourite colour?* ◊ *bright / dark / light colours* ◊ *avail-*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 248)

**ab-sorb** /əb'sɔːb; -zɔːb; AmE -sɔːrb; -zɔːrb/ *verb* [VN]  
**LIQUID/GAS** **1** to take in a liquid, gas or other substance from the surface or space around: *Plants absorb oxygen.* ◊ *The cream is easily absorbed into the skin.*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 5)

**fibre** (BrE) (AmE **fiber**) /'faɪbə(r)/ *noun* **1** [U] the part of food that helps to keep a person healthy by keeping the bowels working and moving other food quickly through the body [SYN] ROUGHAGE: *dietary fibre* ◊ *Dried*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 491)

**pro-gramme** (BrE) (AmE **pro-gram**) /'prəʊgræm;  
AmE 'proʊ-/ *noun, verb*

■ *noun*

**PLAN** **1** a plan of things that will be done or included in the development of sth: *to launch a research programme* ◊ *a training programme for new staff* ◊ *a programme for / of economic reform*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 1054)

**groan** /grəʊn; AmE groʊn/ *verb, noun*

■ *verb* **1** ~ (at/with sth) to make a long deep sound because you are annoyed, upset or in pain, or with pleasure: [v] *to groan with pain / pleasure* ◊ *He lay on the floor groaning.* ◊ *We all groaned at his terrible jokes.* ◊ *They were all moaning and groaning (=*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 593)

**cheque** (BrE) (AmE **check**) /tʃek/ *noun* a printed form that you can write on and sign as a way of paying for sth instead of using money: *a cheque for £50* ◊ *to write a cheque* ◊ *to make a cheque out to sb* ◊ *to pay by cheque* ◊ *to cash a cheque* (= to get or give money for a cheque)—see also BLANK CHEQUE, TRAVELLER'S CHEQUE—picture at MONEY

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 214)

**often** /'ɒfn; 'ɒftən; AmE 'ɔ:fn; 'ɔ:ftən; 'ɑ:f-/ *adv.* **1** many times [SYN] FREQUENTLY: *We often go there.* ◊ *I've often wondered what happened to him.* ◊ *How often do you go to the theatre?* ◊ *I see her quite often.* ◊ *Try to exer-*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 917)

**cata-logue** (*AmE* also **cata-log**) /'kætəlɒg; *AmE* -ləʒ; -lɑːg/ *noun, verb*

- **noun 1** a complete list of items, for example of things that people can look at or buy: *a mail-order catalogue* (= a book showing goods for sale to be sent to people's homes) ◊ *to consult the library catalogue* ◊ *An illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition.* ◊ *an online catalogue* **2** a long series of things that happen (usually bad things): *a catalogue of disasters / errors / misfortunes*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 195)

**vita-min** /'vɪtəmm; *AmE* 'vaɪ-/ *noun* a natural substance found in food that is an essential part of what humans and animals eat to help them grow and stay healthy. There are many different vitamins: *Oranges are rich in vitamin C.* ◊ *breakfast cereals enriched with vitamins* ◊ *vitamin deficiency* ◊ *vitamin pills*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 1505)

	alternative spelling
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	



## 5. Parts of Speech

When you are uncertain about what part of speech a word is, you can also check it in a dictionary. Most dictionaries use abbreviations to indicate a part of speech of a word as shown in Figure 1.8.

**cart<sup>1</sup>** /kɑ:t||kɑ:rt/ *n* [C] **1** a vehicle with two or four wheels that is pulled by a horse and used for carrying heavy things —see also **HANDCART** **2** *AmE* a large wire basket on wheels that you use in a **SUPERMARKET**; **TROLLEY** (1) *BrE* **3** *AmE* a small table with wheels, used to move and serve food and drinks; **TROLLEY** (2) *BrE* **4** **put the cart before the horse** to do things in the wrong order —see also **upset the apple cart** (**UPSET**<sup>1</sup> (5))

**cart<sup>2</sup>** *v* [T always + adv/prep] **1** *informal* to carry something that is awkward or heavy: *I was really tired after carting all that furniture upstairs.* **2** to carry something in a cart: [+ **away**] *The corn sacks were carted away.*

Figure 1.8 Parts of speech

Source (Summers, 1995: 193)

## 6. Meanings

A lot of English words have more than one meaning. You can look up in a dictionary to see how many meanings a word has. If a word has more than one meaning, most dictionaries list them in numbers. For example, the word ‘diner’ has three different meanings as shown in Figure 1.9.

**din·er** /'daɪnə||-ər/ *n* [C] **1** someone who is eating dinner in a restaurant **2** *AmE* a small restaurant that serves cheap meals: *She's a waitress in an all-night diner in North Vegas.* **3** *AmE* a **DINING CAR**

Figure 1.9 A word with several meanings

Source (Summers, 1995: 377)

Exercise 4: Look at the excerpted parts of *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* below and answer the following questions.

**fi-nal-ize** also **-ise** BrE /'faɪnəl-aɪz/ v [T] to finish the last part of a plan, business deal etc: *Jo flew out to Thailand to finalize the details of the deal.* — **finalization** /,faɪnəl-aɪ'zeɪʃən/ n [U]

**fi-nal-ly** /'faɪnəl-i/ adv **1** after a long time: *After several delays we finally took off at six o'clock. Finally, to my relief, Garth brought up the subject of money.* **2** as the last of a series of things: [sentence adverb] *And finally, I'd like to thank the crew.* **3** in a finished state: *It's not finally settled yet.* — see LASTLY (USAGE)

**fi-nance**<sup>1</sup> /'faɪnæns, fɪ'næns/|fɪ'næns, 'faɪnæns/ n **1** [U] the management of money, especially money controlled by a government, company, or large organization: *the university's finance committee* | **high finance** (=financial activities involving countries or large companies) **2 finances** **a)** the money that a person, company, organization etc has available: *The committee's finances are very limited.* **b)** the way a person, company, organization etc manages their money: *My finances are in a real mess.* **3** [U] money, especially money provided by a bank, to help run a business or buy something: [+ for] *We need to raise finance for further research.*

**finance**<sup>2</sup> v [T] to provide money, especially a large amount of money, to pay for something: *These concerts are financed by the Arts Council.*

**finance com-pa-ny** /'faɪnæns, 'fai- / n [C] AmE a company that lends money, especially to businesses

**fi-nan-cial** /fɪ'nænsjəl, faɪ-/ adj connected with money or the management of money: *New York is a great financial center.* | *financial assistance for city schools* | **a financial success** (=something that makes a profit) *It was a wonderful film, but not exactly a financial success.* — **financially** adv

Source (Summers, 1995: 520)

- 1) Which word can be both a noun and a verb?

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- 2) Which word is an adjective?

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- 3) Which word is an adverb?

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- 4) How many meanings does the word 'finalize' have?

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- 5) How many meanings does the word 'finally' have?

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## 7. Types of Language

Types of language such as formal or informal, spoken or written, old-fashioned, or slang are usually presented in a dictionary along with other details.

**ap-o-plec-tic** /,æpə'plektɪk/ *adj* **1** *informal* so angry or excited that your face becomes red: *The colonel was apoplectic with rage.* **2** connected with apoplexy

**ap-o-plex-y** /'æpəpleksi/ *n* [U] *old-fashioned* an illness caused by a problem in your brain which can damage your ability to move, feel, or think; **STROKE**<sup>1</sup> (1)

**a-pos-ta-sy** /ə'pɒstəsi||ə'pɑː-/ *n* [U] *formal* the act of changing your beliefs so that you stop supporting a religion, political party etc

**a-pos-tate** /ə'pɒsteɪt, -stɪt||ə'pɑː-/ *n* [C] *formal* someone who has stopped believing in and supporting their old religion or political party

Figure 1.10 Types of language

Source (Summers, 1995: 51)

## 8. American and British English Words

Americans and the British people do not only spell some words differently but they also use some totally different words for calling people and things. Students who study English as a second or foreign language may find this confusing but a good dictionary can be a lot of help in this case. For example, you can see that the word 'bar chart' from Figure 1.11 below, is a British English word while Americans would say 'bar graph' for the same thing.

**bar chart** /'bɑːtʃ/ *n* [C] *BrE* a picture of boxes of different heights, in which each box represents a different amount, for example an amount of profit made in a particular month; **BAR GRAPH** *AmE* —see picture at **CHART**<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1.11 American and British English words

(Summers, 1995: 89)

## 9. Synonyms and Antonyms

In your writing, it would be monotonous to use one word several times. You could avoid this problem by looking up words in a dictionary for their synonyms

or words that mean exactly or almost the same. Also, most dictionaries usually provide you with antonyms or words that have opposite meanings.

**won-der-ful** /ˈwʌndəfl; AmE -dərfl/ *adj.* **1** very good, pleasant or enjoyable: *a wonderful view / opportunity / person / surprise / day* ◊ *We had a wonderful time last night.* ◊ *You've all been absolutely wonderful!* ◊ *It's wonderful to see you!* **2** making you feel surprise or admiration [SYN] REMARKABLE: *It's wonderful what you can do when you have to.*

Figure 1.12 Synonyms

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 1550)

**help-ful** /ˈhelpfl/ *adj.* **1** ~ (for sb) (to do sth) | ~ (in doing sth) | ~ (to sb) useful and able to improve a particular situation: *helpful advice / information / suggestions* ◊ *Sorry I can't be more helpful.* ◊ *It would be helpful for me to see the damage for myself.* ◊ *Role-play is helpful in developing communication skills.* ◊ *The booklet should be very helpful to parents of disabled children.* **2** (of a person) willing to help sb: *I called the police but they weren't very helpful.* ◊ *The staff couldn't have been more helpful.* [OPP] UNHELPFUL

Figure 1.13 Antonyms

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 634)

Exercise 5: Look at the excerpted parts of *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* below and answer the following questions.

A.

**back-ward** /ˈbækwəd; AmE -wərd/ *adj.* **1** [only before noun] directed or moving towards the back: *She strode past him without a backward glance.* **2** moving in a direction that means that no progress is being made [SYN] RETROGRADE: *She felt that going back to live in her home town would be a backward step.* **3** having made less progress than normal; developing slowly: *a backward part of the country, with no paved roads and no electricity* ◊ *a backward child* ◊ (BrE, spoken) *She's not backward in coming forward* (= she's not shy).—compare FORWARD

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 82)

B.

**baddy** /ˈbædi/ *noun* (pl. -ies) (BrE, informal) a bad or evil character in a film/movie, book, play, etc: *As usual, the cops get the baddies in the end.*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 83)

C.

**woe-ful** /'wəʊfl; AmE 'woʊfl/ *adj.* **1** [usually before noun] very bad or serious; that you disapprove of [SYN] DEPLORABLE: *She displayed a woe-ful ignorance of the rules.* **2** (literary or formal) very sad: *a woe-ful face* ◊ *woe-ful tales of broken romances* ► **woe-ful-ly** /-fəli/ *adv.*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 1549)

D.

**align** /ə'laɪn/ *verb* **1** ~ (sth) (with sth) to arrange sth in the correct position, or to be in the correct position, in relation to sth else, especially in a straight line: [VN] *Make sure the shelf is aligned with the top of the cupboard.* ◊ [V] *The top and bottom line of each column on the page should align.* **2** [VN] ~ sth (with/ to sth) to change sth slightly so that it is in the correct relationship to sth else: *Domestic prices have been aligned with those in world markets.* [PHR V] **align yourself with sb/sth** to publicly support an organization, a set of opinions or a person that you agree with

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 31)

E.

**wicked** /'wɪkɪd/ *adj., noun*  
 ■ *adj.* (wick-ed-er, wick-ed-est) [HELP] You can also use more wicked and most wicked. **1** morally bad [SYN] EVIL: *a wicked man/deed* ◊ *stories about a wicked witch* **2** (informal) slightly bad but in a way that is amusing and/or attractive [SYN] MISCHIEVOUS: *a wicked grin* ◊ *Jane has a wicked sense of humour.* **3** dangerous, harmful or powerful: *He has a wicked punch.* ◊ *a wicked-looking knife* ◊ *The rejection was a wicked blow to her pride.* **4** (slang) very good: *This song's wicked.* ► **wick-ed-ly** *adv.*: *Martin grinned wickedly.* ◊ *a wickedly funny comedy* ◊ *a wickedly sharp blade*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 1539)

- 1) Which are informal words? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Which is a formal word? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Which entries provide a synonym of their headword? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Which is a British English word? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Which word can be slang? \_\_\_\_\_

Exercise 6: Match the numbers with the information given in the word entries.

- 1) headword      2) entry      3) guide word      4) pronunciation  
 5) parts of speech    6) synonym    7) type of language  
 8) different spellings for British English and American English  
 9) different words for British English and American English

	<b>candle</b> <span style="float: right;">182</span>
	<b>can-dle</b> /'kændl/ <i>noun</i> a round stick of WAX with a piece of string (called a WICK) through the middle which is lit to give light as it burns <b>IDM cannot hold a candle to sb/sth</b> is not as good as sb or sth else: <i>His singing can't hold a candle to Pavarotti's.</i> —more at BURN <i>v.</i> , WORTH <i>adj.</i>
	<b>candle-light</b> /'kændllaɪt/ <i>noun</i> [U] the light that a candle produces: <i>to read by candlelight</i>
	<b>candle-lit</b> /'kændllɪt/ <i>adj.</i> [only before noun] lit by candles: <i>a romantic candlelit dinner</i>
	<b>candle-stick</b> /'kændlstɪk/ <i>noun</i> an object for holding a candle
	<b>candle-wick</b> /'kændlwɪk/ <i>noun</i> [U] a soft cotton fabric with a raised pattern of threads, used especially for making BEDSPREADS
	<b>can-do</b> <i>adj.</i> [only before noun] ( <i>informal</i> ) willing to try new things and expecting that they will be successful: <i>a can-do attitude / spirit</i>
	<b>cand-our</b> ( <i>BrE</i> ) ( <i>AmE candor</i> ) /'kændə(r)/ <i>noun</i> [U] the quality of saying what you think openly and honestly: <i>'I don't trust him,' he said, in a rare moment of candour.</i> —see also CANDID
	<b>C &amp; W</b> <i>abbr.</i> COUNTRY AND WESTERN
	<b>candy</b> /'kændi/ <i>noun</i> [U, C] ( <i>pl. -ies</i> ) ( <i>AmE</i> ) sweet food made of sugar and/or chocolate, eaten between meals; a piece of this <b>SYN</b> SWEET: <i>a box of candy</i> ◊ <i>a candy store</i> ◊ <i>a candy bar</i> ◊ <i>Who wants the last piece of candy?</i>
	<b>'candy apple</b> <i>noun</i> ( <i>AmE</i> ) = TOFFEE APPLE
	<b>candy-floss</b> /'kændɪflɒs; <i>AmE</i> -flɔ:s; -flɑ:s/ ( <i>BrE</i> ) ( <i>AmE</i> <b>'cotton candy</b> ) <i>noun</i> [U] a type of sweet/candy in the form of a mass of sticky threads made from melted sugar and served on a stick, especially at FAIRGROUNDS

## Part II: How to Get the Right Meaning of a Word

What should we do when we come across the word with more than one meaning? In this part, you are going to learn how to choose the right meaning of a word.

Step 1: You have to check what part of speech the word is. Some words with the same spelling can be both a noun and a verb or a noun and an adjective. You need to know its function in the sentence so that you can choose the correct meaning.

Step 2: If the word has more than one meaning for one part of speech, you need to replace the word in the sentence with those meanings. Then, see which one makes sense the most.

Take a look at the entries of the word 'bat' and the example sentences below. Let's see if you can choose the right meaning for each sentence.

**bat** /bæt/ *noun, verb*

- **noun** **1** a piece of wood with a handle, made in various shapes and sizes, and used for hitting the ball in games such as baseball, cricket and table tennis: a *baseball/cricket bat*—compare **RACKET** **2** an animal like a mouse with wings, that flies and feeds at night (= it is **NOCTURNAL**). There are many types of bat.—see also **FRUIT BAT**, **OLD BAT**, **VAMPIRE BAT**—picture on page A6 **IDM** **like a bat out of 'hell** (*informal*) very fast **off your own 'bat** (*BrE, informal*) if you do sth **off your own bat**, it is your own idea and you do it without help or encouragement from anyone else (**right**) **off the 'bat** (*informal, especially AmE*) immediately; without delay—more at **BLIND** *adj.*
- **verb** (**-tt-**) to hit a ball with a bat, especially in a game of cricket or baseball: [*v*] *He bats very well.* ◦ *Who's batting first for the Orioles?* [also *vn*] —picture on page 1302 **IDM** **bat your 'eyes/'eyelashes** to open and close your eyes quickly, in a way that is supposed to be attractive **bat a 'thousand** (*AmE, informal*) to be very successful **go to 'bat for sb** (*AmE, informal*) to give sb help and support **not bat an 'eyelid** (*BrE*) (*AmE* **not bat an 'eye**) (*informal*) to show no surprise or embarrassment when sth unusual happens: *She didn't bat an eyelid when I told her my news.* **PHR V** **bat sth↔a'round** (*informal*) to discuss whether an idea or a plan is good or not, before deciding what to do: *It's just an idea we've been batting around.*

Figure 1.14 The entry of 'bat'

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 94-95)

- A. The coach was mad after Josh batted badly.
- B. The kids were amazed after learning that some bats drank blood.
- C. A little girl is asking the baseball players to sign their autographs on her bat.

In sentence A, it is easy to tell the meaning of the word ‘bat’ since it acts as a verb of the sentence and there is only one meaning for ‘bat’ as a verb. On the other hand, we have to pay more attention to the sentences B and C. The word ‘bat’ acts as a noun in both sentences and there are two meanings for ‘bat’ as a noun. To get the right meaning, we have to replace the word ‘bat’ in those two sentences with each meaning. We can then tell that the first meaning in the entry can’t go with sentence B because a piece of wood wouldn’t be able to drink blood; meanwhile, the second meaning is not for sentence C since the girl wouldn’t ask the players to sign on an animal. In contrast, if we swap the meanings for each sentence, they would match perfectly.

Exercise 7: Look at each word entry and choose the meaning that best match the underlined word in the sentences.

1.  a) **book<sup>1</sup>** /buk/ *n*  
**1** ► **PRINTED BOOK** ◀ [C] a set of printed pages that are fastened together in a cover so that you can read them: *I'm reading a book by Graham Greene. | Nothing beats curling up with a good book.*
- b) **book<sup>2</sup>** *v* **1** [I,T] *BrE* to arrange with a hotel, restaurant, theatre etc to go there at a particular time in the future: *I've booked a table for two at Mario's tonight. | We need to*

Source (Summers, 1995: 138)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) Megan lent me a book written by her school friend.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2) We are surprised that he has booked a room at a 5-star riverside hotel.



2. a) **change** /tʃeɪndʒ/ *verb, noun*  
 ■ *verb*  
**BECOME/MAKE DIFFERENT** **1** [v] to become different: *Rick hasn't changed. He looks exactly the same as he did at school.* ◊ *changing attitudes towards education* ◊ *Her life changed completely when she won the lottery.*
- b) ■ *noun*  
**MONEY** **5** [U] the money that you get back when you have paid for sth giving more money than the amount it costs: *Don't forget your change!* ◊ *That's 40p change.*

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 206-207)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) The cashier forgot to give me 50 baht change.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2) This town has changed a lot.

3. a) **jam** /dʒæm/ *noun, verb*  
 ■ *noun*  
**SWEET FOOD** **1** [U, C] a thick sweet substance made by boiling fruit with sugar, often sold in JARS and spread on bread: *strawberry jam* ◊ *recipes for jams and preserves* ◊ (BrE) *a jam doughnut*—compare JELLY, MARMALADE—picture on page A1
- b) **MANY PEOPLE/VEHICLES** **2** [C] a situation in which it is difficult or impossible to move because there are so many people or vehicles in one particular place: *The bus was delayed in a five-mile jam.* ◊ *As fans rushed to leave, jams formed at all the exits.*—see also TRAFFIC JAM

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 724)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) I'd like two slices of bread spread with strawberry jam.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2) I was late because I had been stuck in a traffic jam for two hours.

4. **date** /deɪt/ *noun, verb*  
 ■ *noun*
- a) **ROMANTIC MEETING** **4** [C] a meeting that you have arranged with a boyfriend or girlfriend or with sb who might become a boyfriend or girlfriend: *I've got a*
- b) **FRUIT** **6** [C] a sweet sticky brown fruit that grows on a tree called a **date palm**, common in N Africa and W Asia

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 335)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) Don't forget to buy me some dried dates from the supermarket.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2) Jason is going to ask Susan out on a date tomorrow.

5.

**match** /mætʃ/ *noun, verb*■ *noun*

**FOR LIGHTING FIRES** **1** [C] a small stick made of wood or cardboard that is used for lighting a fire, cigarette, etc: *a box of matches* ◊ *to strike a match* (= to make it burn) ◊ *to put a match to sth* (= set fire to sth)

**IN SPORT** **2** [C] (*especially BrE*) a sports event where people or teams compete against each other: (*BrE*) *a football match* ◊ (*AmE, BrE*) *a tennis match* ◊ *They are playing an important match against Liverpool on Saturday.*—see also **SLANGING MATCH**

a)

b)

Source (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier, 2000: 822)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1) I'm not going to miss the match between England and France.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2) Kim lit the candle with a match.

Activity: Group work. Work in a group of five. Select one page of an English-English dictionary. Indicate what kinds of information are given in the same way you did in exercise 6. Try to find a page with word entries that can show all kinds of information you've learned from Part I.

## References

Hornby, A. S., Ashby, M., & Wehmeier, S. (2000). **Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Summers, D. (1995). **Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English**. Harlow, Essex: Longman.