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Word Clearing Series 22RA

HOW TO USE A DICTIONARY

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Diction comes from the Latin word meaning a word or to say; ary means a collection of or a thing connected with.

A dictionary tells a person how to say a word, what it means, how to spell it and how to use it. Dictionaries usually will tell you where a word comes from. A dictionary is a word book.

Definitions in dictionaries are not always complete and in some cases are not totally correct. Remember that dictionaries are written by people who themselves might have misunderstands. So do not treat them as religious texts which must be believed. They are mostly correct, but they are just tools.

THE ALPHABET

Knowledge of the alphabet is the key to finding words quickly. To use a dictionary rapidly, one has to be able to recite the alphabet rapidly and know the relations of letters in the alphabet one to the other instantly. Otherwise, one can get lost and it will take a long time to look up words. One literally has to know the alphabet backwards and forwards.

Words are arranged in alphabetical order in all dictionaries. A dictionary has a section for each letter of the alphabet. The first letter of the word one is looking up tells one which section of the dictionary to look in. Within any section, words are further arranged alphabetically by their second letters, then their third letters and so on. For instance, the word cat would be found after the word castle and before the word catch.

GUIDE WORDS

At the top of each page of the dictionary, there are words printed in black heavy type. They are called guide words. Guide words show the first and the last words printed on that page or in that column. The page of the dictionary one wants can be found by looking at the guide words on each page. Guide words help one find the word being looked for faster.

PRONUNCIATION AND PARTS OF SPEECH

Pronunciation means the way something is said. A dictionary tells one how to pronounce a word and this is given in the dictionary right after the word itself and is usually in parentheses is shown by:

a. How the word is divided into syllables (a syllable is a word or a small part of a word which can be pronounced with a single, uninterrupted sounding of the voice)

b. How the word, if it has two or more syllables, is accented (the emphasizing of one syllable of a word more than another)

c. How the individual letters in a word sound through use of a pronunciation key. For example, the word *elephant* contains three syllables: el' e phant.

The accent mark tells one that the first syllable of the word is the one that is said with emphasis when pronouncing it.

Dictionaries use letters and special marks to show how a word sounds. Generally there are pronunciation keys at the bottom of each page or every other page which list out the most important letters and marks. There is also a complete listing near the front which gives the use of every letter or mark used in that dictionary to show how to pronounce a word. By looking at the letters and or marks in parentheses and checking the pronunciation key at the bottom of the page (or near the front of the dictionary), one learns how the word is pronounced. For instance, to learn how the first “e” of elephant is pronounced, one looks at the key and sees that it is pronounced in the same way as the e in the words “*met*” and “*rest*.” Pronunciation keys differ a bit from dictionary to dictionary but they are all used as described here.

Following the pronunciation, the dictionary then designates what part of speech the word is and, when needed, the singular or plural forms of the word. For example, mouse is a thing, a noun, and its plural form is mice.

DEFINITIONS

Next comes the definition of the word. If it has more than one definition, most dictionaries number them.

Often dictionaries give examples showing the use of the word. But in clearing a word, it is not enough for the person simply to read these examples. He has to make up several of his own before he really knows the word.

Dictionaries also often give specialized definitions when the word has a special meaning in such subjects as law, sports, science, music and so on. They often give slang

(words or phrases that are not considered to be “standard” in the language) definitions for words.

IDIOMS

An idiom is a phrase or expression that has a meaning different from what the words suggest in their usual meaning. For example, to catch one's eye is an idiom which means “*To get one's attention.*”

Most dictionaries include the idioms of a word after the definitions.

DERIVATION

A word's derivation (a statement of the origin of a word) is put in brackets. The derivation can be very important to one's full understanding of the word. Words get altered through the ages. By seeing the derivation one can find out what the word originally meant.

The word's derivation is usually found at the beginning or the end of the definitions in the dictionary.

In the derivation certain signs and abbreviations are used. The sign < means *derived from*.

The sign “+” and means “*and*.”

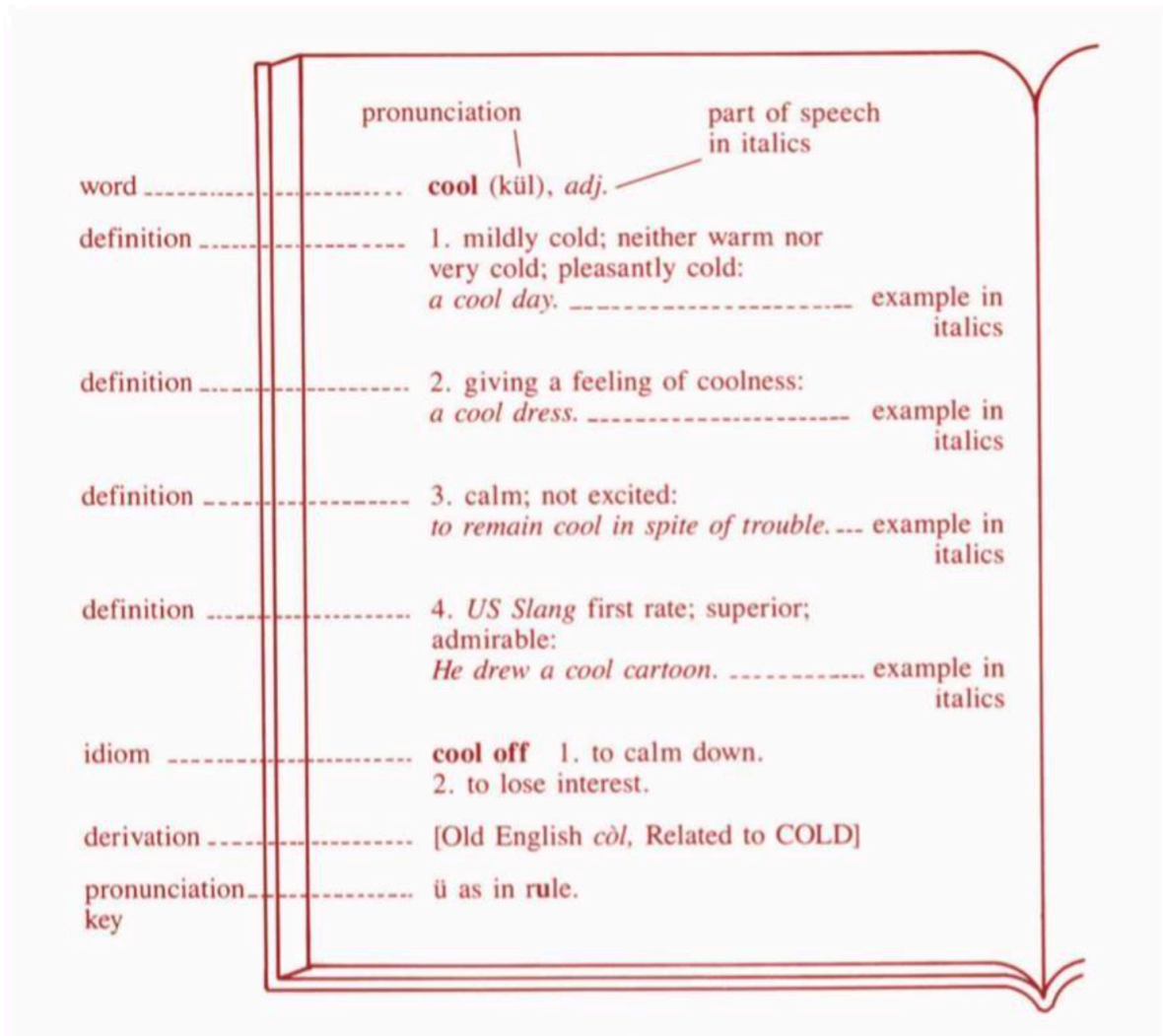
The word or words it comes from are written in italics. Usually abbreviations are used to show the language the word comes from. For example, OE would mean *Old English*, which denotes the English spoken up to approximately the 12th century. These abbreviations are defined in the dictionary. Sometimes at the end of the derivation there is a word written in capital letters. This means that further data on the origin of the word can be found under the derivation of the word in capitals.

EXAMPLE OF A WORD ENTRY

HOW TO BREAK UP A WORD

Occasionally, one cannot find a word in the dictionary but, by separating a word into its component parts, one can look up each part and gain its meaning. Take, for example, the word *antitax*. This word is not defined in most dictionaries, but one can still determine its meaning. One looks up the first part, *anti-*, and finds that it means opposed to. One then looks up the second part of the word, *tax*, and finds that it means money regularly collected from citizens by their rulers. When one combines the two parts, one gets the definition of *antitax* which means “*opposed to*” collecting of money from citizens by their rulers.

Dictionaries sometimes contain lists of such words which are not defined but which can be broken down into their component parts and the meaning determined.



TIPS IN USING THE DICTIONARY TO CLEAR WORDS

Words of a special tech require a dictionary composed of terms for that field, e.g., a photographic dictionary or a nautical dictionary.

To clear a foreign word, get a dictionary of that language. There are two kinds of foreign language dictionaries. One is a dictionary entirely in the foreign language. The other is half in the language the person speaks and half in the foreign language. For instance, in an English/Swedish dictionary, half of the dictionary is English with Swedish words next to it, and the other half is Swedish with its English counterpart next to it. One would use the all-foreign dictionary only when the person being word cleared knew that language fluently.

Dictionaries contain a lot of information. This bulletin covers the basics of how to use one. The format of individual dictionaries varies one to the next but the above fundamentals apply to them all. Dictionaries contain sections in the front which explain how they are used. If one encounters a word, symbol or abbreviation in the entry of a word that he does not understand, he can always turn to this introductory section for help.

A dictionary is indispensable when clearing words. This makes a dictionary an extremely valuable tool for anyone seeking to learn any subject.

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