

Learner's Dictionaries of English

This booklet is for international students who want to expand their general English vocabulary. It introduces dictionaries for English language learners.

There are many good quality dictionaries that are designed especially for learners of English as a Foreign Language. Hardback and paperback copies of good dictionaries can be expensive, but online versions are available for free. Online dictionaries also include word lists, such as the "Oxford 3000" and "Oxford 5000".

What is General Vocabulary?

Words that occur frequently across different academic subjects are classed as general academic vocabulary. Many general English words are used slightly differently in academic texts (e.g. essays, reports, articles). In order to speak and write accurately, students need good knowledge of general academic vocabulary and how to use it.

Metalanguage for talking about vocabulary

In order to use a learner's dictionary of English, it is necessary to know how information is presented and also the vocabulary used in dictionaries.

Meaning & level

Numbers next to words show different meanings. You may also see a letter + number combination next to some words (e.g. B2). These were developed by the Council of Europe (e.g. 2020) and indicate levels of English: **A1** (beginner level); **A2** (elementary level); **B1** (intermediate level); **B2** (upper-intermediate); **C1** (advanced); **C2** (proficient).

Pronunciation

You can learn how to pronounce a word by reading the phonemic transcription /træn'skrɪpʃn/ and listening to audio files in online dictionaries or apps. Most publishers give American and British English pronunciation. A small mark at the top', or bottom means the next part of the word is emphasised.

Grammar

A learner's dictionary gives grammatical information about word class (e.g. noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, idiom, phrasal verb) and the way words are used. In English, nouns can be *countable* or *uncountable*. Some nouns can be both countable and uncountable. For example one meaning of a noun may be countable while another meaning of a noun can be uncountable. There are also nouns which can be countable or uncountable within the same meaning depending on how the word is used.

Vocabulary

A learner's dictionary can help you to discover related words. These might be other forms of a word such as a verb, a noun, an adjective, an adverb, an idiom. You can also find other words with the same meaning, or **synonyms**, as well as words with the opposite meaning, or **antonyms**). A learner's dictionary can also tell you if a word appears on a word list. The names of well-known lists include: Oxford 3000; Oxford 5000.

Idioms

Using idioms is an important feature of language, especially at upper-intermediate (CEFR B2) and advanced levels (CEFR C1, CEFR C2).

Glossary of Vocabulary Terms

The tables below list the meanings of terms used in learner's dictionaries.

Types of Dictionaries	Description
BILINGUAL /ˌbaɪˈlɪŋɡwəl/	A dictionary that uses languages such as English and Mandarin; English and Spanish ('bi' = two)
MONOLINGUAL /ˌmɒnəˈlɪŋɡwəl/	A dictionary that uses only one language such as English ('mono' = one)
THESAURUS /θɪˈsɔːrəs/	A dictionary of lists of words with the same or similar meanings. For example: <i>conversation: chat, dialogue, talk</i>

Word Class [feature]	Meaning
NOUN /naʊn/	A word that refers to a person, a place, a thing, a quality, or an activity. Nouns are often used with <i>the</i> , <i>a</i> , or <i>an</i> . For example: 'Pass me a <i>book</i> from the <i>shelf</i> .'
NOUN , countable	If a noun is countable, it means that the object the noun refers to can be counted. Examples of countable nouns are: ' <i>car</i> ', ' <i>chair</i> ', ' <i>book</i> ', ' <i>city</i> '.
NOUN , uncountable	If a noun is uncountable (also called 'mass nouns'), it means that the object the noun refers to cannot be counted. Examples of uncountable nouns are: ' <i>water</i> ', ' <i>accommodation</i> ', ' <i>furniture</i> ', ' <i>money</i> '.
ADJECTIVE /ˈædʒɪktɪv/	A word that describes a person or thing. For example: 'The <i>blue</i> book on the shelf.'
VERB /vɜːb/	A word or group of words that expresses an action (such as <i>eat</i>), an event (such as <i>happen</i>) or a state (such as <i>exist</i>) For example: 'The young child is <i>learning to read</i> .'

VERB , intransitive	When a verb is intransitive, this means it does not need an object. For example, ' <i>It's raining</i> '.
VERB , transitive	When a verb is transitive, this means it does need an object. For example, in the sentence ' <i>She's describing a picture</i> ' we need to say what she is describing.
ADVERB /'ædvɜːb/	A word that gives more information about a verb or adjective, such as place, time, manner, cause, degree. For example: 'She read the book <i>quickly</i> '.
PREPOSITION /,prepə'zɪn/	A word or group of words that show time, place, position, time, or method. For example: 'Pass me that blue book <i>on</i> the shelf.'
PHRASAL VERB /,freɪzl 'vɜːb/	A combination of verb + preposition or adverb to give a new meaning. For example: ' <i>to book into</i> a hotel' means to arrange to stay there.
IDIOM /'ɪdiəm/	A group of words that have a different meaning as a group than each individual word. For example: ' <i>to be in somebody's good books</i> ' means that someone is pleased with you.

Pronunciation & Spelling	Meaning
PRONOUNCE	To say, or sound out a word
STRESS /stres/	To give extra force to a word or syllable when saying it
SPELL	To say the letters in a word – one-by-one.

Dictionaries for Learners of General English

The Cambridge Learner's Dictionary of English

The *Cambridge Learner's Dictionary*, published by Cambridge University Press, contains all the words an intermediate learner of English needs to know. It contains thousands of carefully chosen real-world examples from the *Cambridge English Corpus*. It is targeted in particular at CEFR levels B1-B2 from the *English Vocabulary Profile*. This means that it is ideal for learners who need vocabulary at intermediate and upper-intermediate level. Students who are learning vocabulary for Cambridge exams will find it particularly useful at intermediate levels: the Key English Test (KET), Preliminary English Test (PET), and First Certificate in English (FCE).

Cambridge University Press also publishes the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, which targets C1–C2 users with over 140,000 words, phrases, and expanded

academic sections. This is particularly useful for students who are preparing for the Certificate in Advanced English (CAE) or Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE).

The online dictionary features audio files for the pronunciation of words, carefully chosen example sentences from the *Cambridge English Corpus*, a large database of real-world spoken and written examples. It also includes a thesaurus (a dictionary of *synonyms* - words with the same or similar meanings), interactive grammar exercises at intermediate and advanced levels, as well as vocabulary exercises.

Key features:

- includes all the vocabulary that intermediate-level students need to know;
- marks important words (using research from the *English Profile* framework) so students can learn the most frequent words first;
- gives clear, simple definitions that language learners can easily understand;
- includes error notes in 'Common Mistake' boxes which highlight frequent grammar, spelling, and usage problems;
- includes mini-sections called 'Collocation & Word Partner Panels' that show words that naturally go together (e.g., *make a decision* vs. *do a favor*), aiding more natural sentence construction;
- provides full-color illustrations, maps, and thematic vocabulary pages to help students understand related word groups (e.g. vehicles, home items).

A stand out feature is the 'Common Mistake' notes based on real-world exam and assignment mistakes made by non-native writers. Although, these can be a little difficult to find, the notes are ideal for helping learners prevent errors. An example note for the verb 'discuss' is shown below:

Navigation path = [Grammar](#) > [Common mistakes in English](#) > [Word patterns](#) > [Word patterns: discuss](#)

Discuss

Discuss is a noun meaning 'to talk about a subject with someone and tell each other your ideas or opinions'.

When you want to mention the subject you are discussing, do not use a preposition.

~~We discussed about the plans for the wedding.~~

We discussed the plans for the wedding.

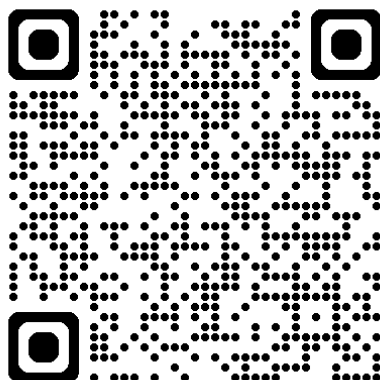
~~We need to discuss about company strategy.~~

We need to discuss company strategy.

You can discuss something with someone.

Can I discuss this report with you?

Use the QR code below to visit the Cambridge Learner's Dictionaries Online website:



<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/>

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

Oxford University Press publish an Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) which is now in its 10th edition. It contains more than 60,00 words, 79,000 phrases, 89,000 meanings and 109,000 examples. It is specifically designed for learners who are progressing from an upper-intermediate to advanced level of English (CEFR B2-C2). It can give you information about related words. These include *synonyms*, that is, words with the same, or a similar meaning. It also gives *collocations*. These are words that are seen together in the language more frequently than by chance. It also includes the *Oxford 3000™* and *Oxford 5000™* word lists. Buying a hard copy will also give you 'Premium' access to online version of the dictionary, as well as the app. The online version of the OALD includes interactive tools, such as the *iSpeaker* and *iWriter*. OALD is also available as an app.

Key features:

- clear definitions using a controlled vocabulary (through the Oxford 3000) to make word meanings easy for learners to understand;
- explicitly tags words from graded word lists in general English (*Oxford 3000™* and *Oxford 5000™*). This helps students learn more frequent vocabulary (A1-B2) over high-level vocabulary (B2-C1);
- clear Usage Notes that explain how to use words correctly and avoid common mistakes;
- Features real world examples and frequent word combinations (collocations) and grammatical patterns.

The Oxford 3000™ Word List

The *Oxford 3000*™ is a list of the 3,000 most important words that learners of English need to know. The words are selected based on their frequency and are aligned to the CEFR levels (A1-B2). The level is shown as a letter and number (e.g. B2 for upper-intermediate) and have a key icon. Clicking the key icon will take you to the word on the *Oxford 3000*™ list. Downloadable versions of *Oxford 3000*™ are available from the Oxford Dictionaries online website in alphabetical order: [The Oxford 3000.pdf](#) and organised by CEFR level: [The Oxford 3000 by CEFR level.pdf](#) . Copies are also available on this EFL Tutoring website in the Vocabulary section.

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A stand out feature is the use of tags to word lists. For example, in the entry for the word '*administration*', OALD includes a key icon which tags '*administration*' to the Oxford 3000™ word list. An example entry is shown below.

Definition of administration noun from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

administration *noun*

 /əd,mɪnɪ'streɪʃn/

 /əd,mɪnɪ'streɪʃn/

1  (also informal **admin**)

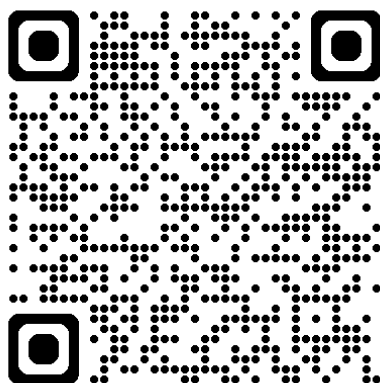
[uncountable] the activities that are done in order to plan, organize and run a business, school or other institution

- *Administration costs are passed on to the customer.*
- *the day-to-day administration of a company*
- *I work in the Sales Administration department.*

SEE ALSO [business administration](#)

Click/tap the key icon to go to the Oxford word list

Use the QR code below to visit the Oxford Learners Dictionaries Online website:



<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)

The entire Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) contains 230,000 words, phrases, and meanings and 165,000 real-life example sentences. It has an integrated thesaurus, collocations, and grammar information. The definitions are written using a fixed set of 2,000 words to make the definitions easy for English language learners to understand.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) online includes monolingual and bilingual dictionaries for learners of English. There are bilingual dictionaries in Korean-English, Japanese-English, and Latin American Spanish-English. There are interactive grammar exercises at intermediate and advanced levels, as well as vocabulary exercises.

Key features:

- interactive vocabulary and grammar exercises (for learning synonyms, collocations, idioms, intermediate/advanced grammar)
- highlights the 9,000 most important words with red circles ●○○
- list most common meanings first
- contrasts spoken English with written English in *Register Notes*
- includes meanings from the Longman Business English Dictionary with examples sentences real texts (e.g. the Financial Times, the Wall Street Journal)

One stand-out feature in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English is the way multiple meanings are *signposted* with bright, bold, tags next to each definition to

summarise the meaning. For example, LDOCE lists more than 30 meanings of the word *run*. The first 10 meanings with signposts (in yellow) are shown below:

Run

- 1 **move quickly using your legs**a) [**intransitive**] to move very quickly, by moving your legs more quickly than when you walk
- 2 **race**a) [**intransitive, transitive**] to run in a race
- 3 **organize/be in charge of** [**transitive**] to organize or be in charge of an activity, business, organization, or country
- 4 **do something/go somewhere quickly** [**intransitive**] to do something or go somewhere quickly
- 5 **buses/trains etc**a) [**intransitive**] if a bus, train etc service runs, it takes people from one place to another at fixed times
- 6 **computers**a) [**intransitive**] if a computer program runs, it operates
- 7 **machine/engine**a) [**intransitive**] if a machine or engine runs, it operates
- 8 **tape**a) [**intransitive**] if a tape is running, it is recording
- 9 **newspaper/television**a) [**transitive**] to print something in a newspaper or magazine, or broadcast something on television
- 10 **fast/out of control** [**intransitive always + adverb/preposition**] to move too fast or in an uncontrolled way

Source: <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/run>

Another useful feature is *register notes*. These are particularly useful for helping learners understand differences between written and spoken usage. For example, if you look up *obtain* or *because*, LDOCE shows a box explaining what people actually say rather than write (see below):

Obtain

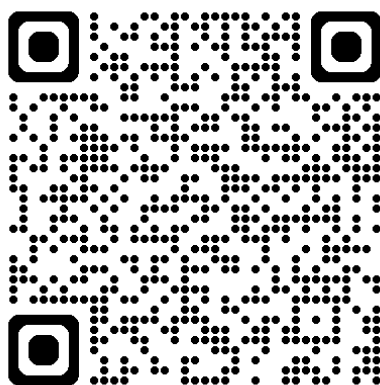
Register

In everyday English, people say that they **get** a result, a ticket, some information etc rather than **obtain** it:

You have to **get** permission from your parents.

Source: <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/obtain>

Use the QR code below to visit the Oxford Learners Dictionaries Online website:



<https://www.ldoceonline.com/>

In summary, all 3 dictionaries are good quality learner's dictionaries. Each dictionary has a slightly different focus and targets different learners. For example, the Cambridge Learner's Dictionary is particularly good for learners preparing for exams and want to focus on learning vocabulary at a particular level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). A stand out feature is the 'Common Mistake' notes based on real-world exam and assignment mistakes made by non-native writers. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is particularly suitable for upper-intermediate learners who are learning English for professional or academic purposes. A key feature is the way it explicitly tags words to words lists of both General English Oxford 3000, Oxford 5000, and Academic English, *Oxford Phrasal Academic Lexicon*. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) is perhaps best for learners who want to develop natural fluency. Features such as its *Register Notes* can help students avoid sounding unnatural through translation-heavy phrasing.

References

Council of Europe (2020). Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing. <https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4>

Oxford Dictionaries Online. Oxford University Press. Available from <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>