

# WORDS ABOUT DICTIONARIES

Even though you have probably used dictionaries many times, you may not be aware of all the kinds of information they contain. Besides providing definitions and pronunciations of words, some dictionaries also give information about word origin, tips about how to use words correctly, facts about geography, and short biographies of well-known people. Certain dictionaries even provide illustrations and photographs that add to the information given in definitions. In this lesson you will learn words that describe the parts of a dictionary and the task of making a dictionary. In addition, you will read an article on how dictionaries were developed.

## WORD LIST

abridge  
browse  
citation  
compendium  
etymology  
gazetteer  
glossary  
lexicography  
phonetics  
syllabication

## DEFINITIONS

After you have studied the definitions and example for each word, write the vocabulary word on the line to the right.

1. **abridge** (ə-brīj') *verb* To shorten a piece of written material, such as a dictionary. (From the Latin word *abbreviare*, meaning "to shorten")

**Related Word** **abridgment** *noun*

**Example** The president of the company asked the secretary to *abridge* the report.

2. **browse** (brouz) *verb* a. To read here and there in a book or other piece of written material. b. To look in a casual manner.

**Example** While I was *browsing* through the dictionary, I noticed an interesting word origin.

3. **citation** (sī-tā'shən) *noun* a. A quotation or reference from a source that has a reputation for accuracy. b. A summons that calls for an appearance in court. (From the Latin word *citare*, meaning "to summon")

**Related Word** **cite** *verb*

**Example** Dictionary entries sometimes contain *citations* showing how a word is used.

4. **compendium** (kəm-pĕn'dē-əm) *noun* A short but complete summary of information on a topic. (From the Latin word *compendere*, meaning "to weigh together")

**Example** The baseball team's annual magazine was a *compendium* of the highlights of that season.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
MEMORY CUE: *Abridge* and *abbreviate* have the same Latin root—*brevis*, "short."

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
USAGE NOTE: *Browse* can also mean "to feed on young shoots and other vegetation." When you *browse* through a book, you "nibble" from the text.

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. **etymology** (ět'ə-mōl'ə-jē) *noun* a. The study of the origin and history of words. b. The origin and history of a particular word. (From the Greek word *etymon*, meaning "true sense of a word")

**Related Words** *etymological adjective; etymologist noun*

**Example** By reading the *etymology*, Paul learned that the word *panel* comes from *pannus*, the Latin word for *cloth*.

6. **gazetteer** (găz'ī-tīr') *noun* A dictionary or a section of a dictionary that contains the names of places and information about those places.

**Example** The *gazetteer* says that Casablanca is in Morocco.

7. **glossary** (glō'sə-rē) *noun* A list of terms and their definitions, often placed at the back of a book. (From the Latin word *glossa*, meaning "an unfamiliar word")

**Example** Larry found the definition of *glucose* in the *glossary* of his science textbook.

8. **lexicography** (lĕk'sī-kŏg'rə-fē) *noun* The process of writing or of compiling a dictionary. (From the Greek words *lexis*, meaning "word," and *graphein*, meaning "to write")

**Related Word** *lexicographer noun*

**Example** Because James had always been interested in words, he prepared for a career in *lexicography*.

9. **phonetics** (fə-nĕt'īks) *noun* The study of the sounds of language. (From the Greek word *phōnein*, meaning "to speak")

**Related Words** *phonetic adjective; phonetically adverb*

**Example** *Phonetics* is a fascinating area of language study.

10. **syllabication** (sī-lăb'ə-kā'shən) *noun* The process of dividing words into units of sound called *syllables*.

**Related Words** *syllabicate verb; syllable noun*

**Example** The *syllabication* of the word *division* is *di vi sion*.

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

USAGE NOTE: You must use a singular verb with the word *phonetics*:  
"Phonetics is interesting."

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**COMPLETING DEFINITIONS**

On the answer line, write the word from the vocabulary list that best completes each definition.

1. When you look casually through a book, you \_\_\_\_\_. 1.
2. A word's origin and history are known as its \_\_\_\_\_. 2.
3. If you shorten a piece of writing, you \_\_\_\_\_ it. 3.
4. Dividing words into units of sound is known as \_\_\_\_\_. 4.
5. A list of difficult words and their meanings in the back of a book is a \_\_\_\_\_. 5.
6. A quotation from a reliable source is a \_\_\_\_\_. 6.
7. A short but complete summary is a \_\_\_\_\_. 7.
8. When you study the sounds of language, you study \_\_\_\_\_. 8.
9. A person who writes or compiles a dictionary is involved in \_\_\_\_\_. 9.
10. A reference book that lists the names of places is a \_\_\_\_\_. 10.

**USING WORDS CORRECTLY**

Each of the following questions contains an italicized vocabulary word. Decide the answer to the question, and write *Yes* or *No* on the answer line.

1. Would you look in an *etymology* for information about Dallas, Texas? 1.
2. If you *abridge* your class report, do you shorten it? 2.
3. Might the *syllabication* of a word help you to pronounce it? 3.
4. Would a *glossary* be useful if you were reading a textbook on an unfamiliar subject? 4.
5. Does a *gazetteer* list verbs and pronouns? 5.
6. Would the study of *phonetics* help you to understand the sounds of language? 6.
7. When you quote a passage from an encyclopedia, are you making a *citation*? 7.
8. Is *lexicography* the study of land formations? 8.
9. Is a definition in a dictionary also known as a *compendium*? 9.
10. If you are to study a textbook chapter carefully, should you *browse*? 10.

## CHOOSING THE BEST WORD

Decide which vocabulary word or related form best expresses the meaning of the italicized word or phrase in the sentence. On the answer line, write the letter of that word.

1. Barney was unable to read his art history book without looking at the *list of difficult words and their definitions*.  
a. glossary      b. etymology      c. compendium      d. citations
2. The word *prim* has an uncertain *history and origin*.  
a. phonetic      b. etymology      c. syllabication      d. abridgment
3. Through *the study of the sounds of language*, experts have developed symbols for pronouncing words.  
a. phonetics      b. lexicography      c. syllabication      d. browsing
4. *Dividing a word* can help a person to pronounce the word.  
a. Citation      b. Browsing      c. Lexicography      d. Syllabication
5. Ramona became a dictionary editor because of her interest in *the writing and compilation of dictionaries*.  
a. abridgments      b. browsing      c. citations      d. lexicography
6. Many people read the *shortened* version of the novel *Don Quixote*.  
a. browsed      b. phonetic      c. abridged      d. etymological
7. Jacques liked to *read bits and pieces* of the books in the library's mystery section.  
a. gloss      b. syllabicate      c. browse through      d. cite
8. Mary used a *quotation* from a medical journal.  
a. glossary      b. citation      c. syllabication      d. compendium
9. Our classroom has a *short but complete summary* of William Shakespeare's plays.  
a. gazetteer      b. lexicon      c. compendium      d. syllable
10. To find out where Timbuktu is, look in a book with a *list of place names*.  
a. etymology      b. browse      c. syllable      d. gazetteer

## USING DIFFERENT FORMS OF WORDS

Decide which form of the vocabulary word in parentheses best completes the sentence. The form given may be correct. Write your answer on the answer line.

1. The teacher prepared a \_\_\_\_\_ of the students' reports. (*compendium*)
2. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a person who studies the origin and history of words. (*etymology*)
3. Ben's ambition is to be a \_\_\_\_\_. (*lexicography*)
4. The newspapers printed an \_\_\_\_\_ of the speech. (*abridge*)
5. Lorraine had to look through three \_\_\_\_\_ before finding the information. (*gazetteer*)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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6. A skillful poet considers the number of \_\_\_\_\_ in each word of a poem.  
(*syllabication*) 6.
7. In court the lawyer \_\_\_\_\_ a little-known decision. (*citation*) 7.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ through bookstores is one of Loretta's favorite activities. (*browse*) 8.
9. The experienced reader can often sound out unfamiliar words \_\_\_\_\_.  
(*phonetics*) 9.
10. It is helpful to have a \_\_\_\_\_ in the back of a textbook. (*glossary*) 10.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DAT \_\_\_\_\_

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 6. A skillful poet considers the number of _____ in each word of a poem.<br>( <i>syllabication</i> ) | 6. _  |
| 7. In court the lawyer _____ a little-known decision. ( <i>citation</i> )                            | 7. _  |
| 8. _____ through bookstores is one of Loretta's favorite activities. ( <i>browse</i> )               | 8. _  |
| 9. The experienced reader can often sound out unfamiliar words _____.<br>( <i>phonetics</i> )        | 9. _  |
| 10. It is helpful to have a _____ in the back of a textbook. ( <i>glossary</i> )                     | 10. _ |

## READING COMPREHENSION

Each numbered sentence in the following passage contains an italicized vocabulary word or related form. After you have read the passage, you will complete an exercise.

### A SHORT HISTORY OF DICTIONARIES

(1) The dictionary, which is now a vast storehouse of definitions, *etymologies*, and other information about words, had a humble beginning about fourteen hundred years ago in Europe. At that time, monks studied books and documents that were written in Latin. (2) When some of the monks *browsed* through the materials, they could not understand difficult Latin words. To help them, monks who had mastered Latin wrote definitions of difficult words in the margins. (3) Later monks translated the definitions into English and collected them into *glossaries*.

(4) Although later writers gathered words into *compendiums*, these books did not contain accurate definitions. (5) The first *lexicographer* to attempt to write an accurate dictionary of the English language was Samuel Johnson, an English writer who lived in the 1700s.

The first American dictionary appeared in 1806. Entitled *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, it was the work of Noah Webster. Webster attempted to make the spellings of words more standard. (6) His first dictionary includes words that are spelled *phonetically*, such as *thum* instead of *thumb* and *hed* instead of *head*. Only a few of Webster's changes, such as ending *theater* with *-er* instead of *-re*, caught on.

Another famous dictionary is *The Oxford English Dictionary*, a series of thirteen volumes providing detailed definitions. (7) In compiling this dictionary, the editors received thousands of words and *citations* from volunteer readers. When the dictionary was completed in 1928, it contained more than 400,000 entries.

(8) Early dictionaries were difficult for children to use, and even *abridged* dictionaries

included words that children were not likely to look up. To help students, Edward L. Thorndike compiled the *Thorndike-Century Junior Dictionary*, which was published in 1935. Since then, other dictionaries, including the *Houghton Mifflin Student Dictionary*, have proven popular among both students and teachers.

(9) Today, all dictionaries give information about pronunciation, meaning, *syllabication*, and parts of speech. (10) In addition, some include *gazetteers* and short biographies of famous people. With these additional features, dictionaries are better able to give us an accurate picture of our changing language.

## READING COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

Each of the following statements corresponds to a numbered sentence in the passage. Each statement contains a blank and is followed by four answer choices. Decide which choice fits best in the blank. The word or phrase that you choose must express roughly the same meaning as the italicized word in the passage. Write the letter of your choice on the answer line.

1. Present dictionaries contain much information about words, including \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. definitions                      c. pronunciation marks  
b. sentences                        d. word histories
2. When monks \_\_\_\_\_, they sometimes did not understand difficult Latin words.  
a. went to church                      c. looked casually through books  
b. translated books                    d. read books closely
3. Later monks collected the definitions in the margins into \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. encyclopedias                      c. pronunciations of names  
b. lists of words and definitions    d. spelling rules
4. Early \_\_\_\_\_ did not contain accurate definitions.  
a. Latin documents                    c. encyclopedias  
b. collections of words                d. indexes
5. Samuel Johnson was an early \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. writer of essays    b. drama critic    c. dictionary writer    d. monk
6. Noah Webster tried to get people to spell \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. by sound    b. by memory    c. correctly    d. in old-fashioned ways
7. For *The Oxford English Dictionary*, volunteer readers sent in words and \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. histories            b. articles            c. symbols            d. quotations
8. Even \_\_\_\_\_ dictionaries had words that children were not likely to use.  
a. picture            b. computer            c. shortened            d. difficult
9. Modern dictionaries give information about parts of speech, pronunciation, meaning, and \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. division of words into units of sound    c. histories of words  
b. geographical locations                      d. famous people
10. \_\_\_\_\_ and short biographies may be found in some dictionaries.  
a. Lists of newspapers                      c. Lists of symbols  
b. Famous quotations                        d. Information about places

## WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Select a topic in which you are especially interested, such as music, sports, computers, television, or photography. Acting as a lexicographer, create a dictionary of terms that are commonly used in that field. In your dictionary you should show each term, its syllabication, its part of speech, and its definition. Write the definitions of the terms in your own words, and include at least ten terms. Make sure that your definitions are clear to someone who has little knowledge about this field.