

# Using a dictionary (1)

## A What dictionaries do I need?

If possible, you should have two dictionaries: a good bilingual dictionary and an English learner's dictionary, designed for students learning English as a second or foreign language. The bilingual dictionary is quicker and easier for you to understand, but the English learner's dictionary may give you more information about a word or phrase. It is also a good idea for you to work in English as much as possible.

## B What information does a dictionary give me?

- the meaning, e.g., homesick [unhappy when you are away from home]
- the pronunciation, e.g., chaos /'keɪ.əs/, dreadful /'dred.fəl/, island /'aɪ.lənd/
- division of syllables, e.g., stu-dent = two syllables
- the part of speech, e.g., dirty *adj.* [adjective], lose *v.* [verb], law *n.* [noun]
- any special grammatical features, e.g., advice (U) [uncountable]
- common collocations (word partners), e.g., you do homework [not you make homework]
- idioms associated with a word, e.g., take your time with the word time
- example phrases or sentences, e.g., It was such a big menu, I didn't know what to choose.
- synonyms (where they exist), e.g., sad = unhappy
- opposites (where they exist), e.g., polite [≠ impolite/rude]
- labels, e.g., formal, informal, spoken, technical, disapproving

part of speech → grammatical feature

pronunciation →

definition → seat **seɪt** /seɪt/ (C) an item of furniture that has been designed for someone to sit on. \* Chairs, stools, sofas and benches are different types of seat. \* All the chairs are taken - I'm afraid you'll have to use this table as a seat. \* A car usually has a driver's seat, a front/passenger seat and back/rear seats. \* Why don't you sit down on that seat over there while we're waiting? \* If you tell someone to have/take a seat you are asking them politely to sit down: Have a seat, Mr. Jones, and tell me what I can do for you. \* Just calm down, take a seat, and describe what happened.

examples →

collocations →

idioms →

## C How should I use my dictionary?

- When you look up a word in your dictionary, put a ✓ next to it. Each time you return to a page with a ✓, look at it quickly to check that you remember the word.
- If you see an English word in a reading passage, first try to guess the meaning, and continue reading to the end of the paragraph or page to see if your guess seems correct. Then use your dictionary to check the meaning.
- If you look up a word in a bilingual dictionary and get several different words in your own language, try looking up the word in your English dictionary. This should help you decide which word in your own language is the nearest translation in this context.
- Remember that many words have more than one meaning, and the first meaning in the dictionary is not always the one you want. Read through the different meanings and check them against the context of your word.

# Exercises

## 3.1

Use a dictionary to find/check the answers to these questions. (They all use words from the opposite page.)

1. What does dreadful mean? *very bad, terrible*
2. How do you pronounce lose? (Is it the same as choose or chose?)
3. What part of speech is choose?
4. What part of speech is homesick?
5. Homework and chaos are both nouns, but what type of noun are they?
6. Write two adjectives that are often used before chaos.
7. How many syllables does chaos have?
8. How do you pronounce the ch in chaos? (Is it the same sound as in character or change?)
9. What two prepositions are often used after choose?
10. Write a sentence using choose with a preposition.

## 3.2

When you look up a word in your dictionary, you can also learn related words and phrases. Find out if your dictionary helps you to answer these questions.

1. Choose is a verb, but what is the noun with the same meaning? *choice*
2. Advice is a noun, but what is the verb with the same meaning?
3. Advice is uncountable, but you can make it countable using another word. Can you complete this sentence: "He gave me a very useful ..... of advice."
4. What adjective is formed from chaos?
5. What is the opposite of dirty?
6. What is the difference between homework and housework?
7. What is the opposite of lose a game?
8. What is the opposite of lose weight?
9. Law often appears in the phrase law and .....
10. If you want to invite someone to sit down in an empty seat, what can you say?

## 3.3

In the word *island* /'aɪ.lənd/, the letter *s* is *silent* [not pronounced]. Use the pronunciation guide in your dictionary to find the silent letters in each of these words. (Do not include the letter *e* at the end of a word.)

island bomb psychology receipt  
castle doubt wrist knife

*Note:* Students often ask if the letter *t* is pronounced in often. Some people pronounce it, others don't. What does your dictionary say?

## 3.4

Do these words or phrases have labels in your dictionary?

*Example:* grungy — informal

bye-bye incision thereby put someone down childish