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# Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English

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THIRD EDITION

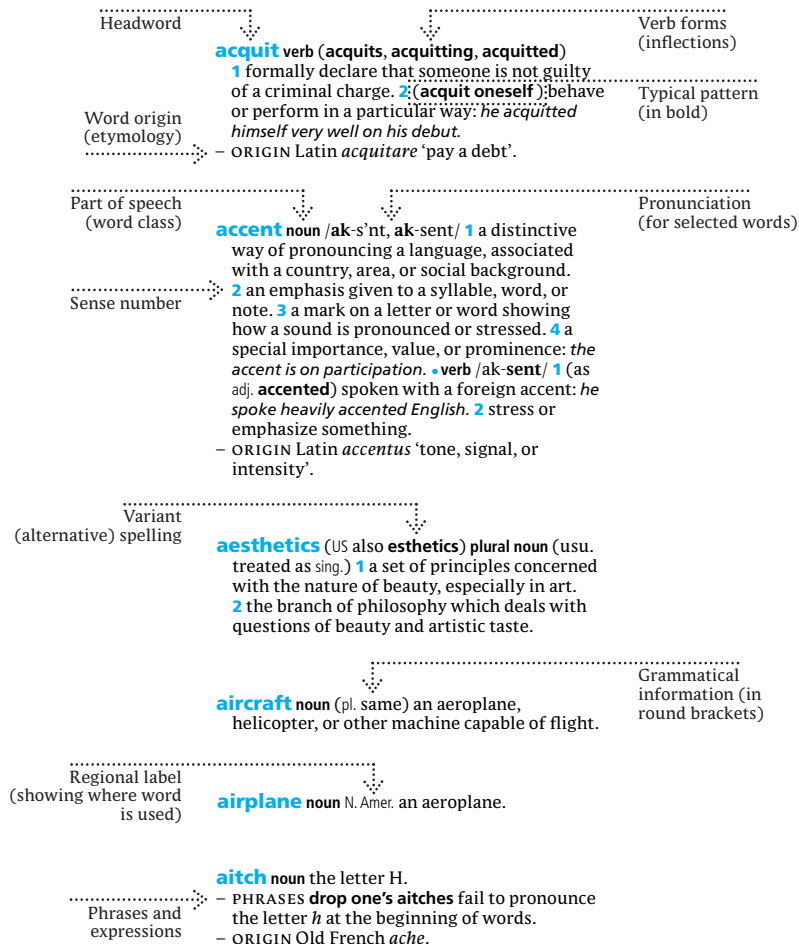
*Edited by*  
Catherine Soanes  
*and* Sara Hawker

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# Guide to the use of the dictionary

## 1. Structure of entries

The *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* is designed to be as straightforward and easy to use as possible. Here is an explanation of the main types of information in the dictionary.



Homonym number  
(shows different  
word with the same  
spelling)

**alight**<sup>1</sup> **verb 1** (alight on) (of a bird) land or settle on something. **2** formal get off a train or bus. **3** (alight on) happen to notice something.

– ORIGIN Old English.

**alight**<sup>2</sup> **adverb & adjective 1** on fire. **2** shining brightly.

**alternate** **verb** /awl-ter-nayt/ **1** occur or do in turn repeatedly: *the narrative alternates personal observation with historical fact.*

**2** change repeatedly between two contrasting states: *his mood alternated between aggression and morose despair.* • **adjective** /awl-ter-nuht/

**1** every other: *the service runs on alternate days.*

**2** (of two things) each following and succeeded by the other in a regular pattern:

*put alternate layers of potatoes and fish in the casserole dish.* **3** chiefly N. Amer. another term for

**ALTERNATIVE.**

– **DERIVATIVES** **alternately** **adverb** **alternation** **noun.**

– **ORIGIN** Latin *alternare* 'do by turns'.

**USAGE:** The use of **alternate** to mean **alternative** (as in *we will need to find alternate sources of fuel*) is common in North American English, though it is still regarded as incorrect by many people in Britain.

Cross reference to  
another word in the  
dictionary  
(in small capitals)

Usage note

Derivatives  
(in alphabetical  
order)

Plural form

**amigo** /uh-mee-goh/ **noun** (pl. **amigos**) informal, chiefly N. Amer. a friend.

– ORIGIN Spanish.

Usage label  
(showing how word  
is used)

**appeal** **verb 1** make a serious or earnest request. **2** be attractive or interesting: *activities that appeal to all.* **3** ask a higher court of law to reverse the decision of a lower court. **4** Cricket

(of the bowler or fielders) call on the umpire to declare a batsman out. • **noun 1** an act of appealing. **2** the quality of being attractive or interesting: *the popular appeal of football.*

– ORIGIN Latin *appellare* 'to address'.

Subject label

Example of use  
(taken from real  
evidence)

**ought** /awt/ (also **ought**) **pronoun** old use anything at all.

– ORIGIN Old English.

Label  
(showing whether  
word is still used)

**esoteric** /e-suh-te-rik, ee-suh-te-rik/ **adjective** intended for or understood by only a small number of people who have a specialized knowledge of something.

- DERIVATIVES **esoterically** *adverb*.
- ORIGIN Greek *esōterikos*.

**esoterica** /e-suh-ter-i-kuh, ee-suh-ter-i-kuh/ **plural noun** subjects or publications understood by or intended for people with a specialized knowledge of something.

**ESP** **abbreviation** extrasensory perception.

**espadrille** /ess-puh-dril/ **noun** a light canvas shoe with a plaited fibre sole.

- ORIGIN French.

**espalier** /i-spal-yuh, e-spal-yuh/ **noun** a fruit tree or ornamental shrub whose branches are trained to grow flat against a wall.

- ORIGIN French.

**esparto** /e-spah-toh, i-spah-toh/ (also **esparto grass**) **noun** (pl. **espartos**) a coarse grass native to Spain and North Africa, used to make ropes, wickerwork, and paper.

- ORIGIN Spanish.

**especial** **adjective** **1** notable; special: *the interior carvings are of especial interest.* **2** for or belonging chiefly to one person or thing.

- ORIGIN Latin *specialis*.

**especially** **adverb** **1** used to single out one person or thing over all others: *both of them were nervous, especially Geoffrey.* **2** to a great extent; very much: *he didn't especially like dancing.*

**USAGE:** Although similar in meaning, the words **especially** and **specially** are not interchangeable. In the broadest terms both can mean 'particularly' (a *song written especially for Jonathan* or a *song written specially for Jonathan*). However, in sentences such as *both of them were nervous, especially Geoffrey*, where **especially** means 'in particular, chiefly', **specially** is informal and should not be used in written English.

**Esperanto** /ess-puh-ran-toh/ **noun** an artificial language invented in 1887 as an international means of communication.

- DERIVATIVES **Esperantist** *noun*.
- ORIGIN from *Dr Esperanto*, a pen name of the inventor; the literal sense is 'one who hopes'.

**espionage** /ess-pi-uh-nahzh/ **noun** the practice of spying or of using spies.

- ORIGIN French.

**esplanade** /ess-pluh-nayd/ **noun** a long, open, level area, typically beside the sea, along which people may walk for pleasure.

- ORIGIN French.

**espousal** /i-spow-z'l/ **noun** an act of adopting or supporting a cause, belief, or way of life: *his espousal of unorthodox religious views.*

**espouse** /i-spowz/ **verb** adopt or support a cause, belief, or way of life.

- ORIGIN Old French *espouser*.

**espresso** /ess-press-oh/ (also **espresso** /ex-press-oh/) **noun** (pl. **espressos**) strong black coffee made by forcing steam through ground coffee beans.

- ORIGIN from Italian *caffè espresso* 'pressed out coffee'.

**esprit** /e-spree/ **noun** liveliness.

- ORIGIN French.

**esprit de corps** /e-spree duh kor/ **noun** a feeling of pride and loyalty uniting the members of a group.

- ORIGIN French, 'spirit of the body'.

**espy** /i-spy/ **verb** (**espies**, **espying**, **espied**) literary catch sight of someone or something.

- ORIGIN Old French *espier*.

**Esq.** **abbreviation** Esquire.

**-esque** **suffix** (forming adjectives) in the style of: *Kafkaesque*.

- ORIGIN French.

**Esquimaux** **noun** (pl. **Esquimaux**) old-fashioned spelling of **ESKIMO**.

**esquire** /i-skwy-er/ **noun** **1** (**Esquire**) Brit. a polite title placed after a man's name when no other title is used. **2** historical a young nobleman who acted as an attendant to a knight.

- ORIGIN Old French *esquier*, from Latin *scutarius* 'shield-bearer'.

**-ess** **suffix** forming nouns referring to females: *abbess*.

- ORIGIN French *-esse*.

**USAGE:** In modern English, many people regard feminine forms such as **poetess** or **authoress** as old-fashioned or sexist. It is therefore often better to use the 'neutral' base form instead (e.g. *she's a famous author*).

**essay** **noun** /ess-ay/ **1** a piece of writing on a particular subject. **2** formal an attempt or effort.

- **verb** /e-say/ formal attempt: *Donald essayed a smile.*

- DERIVATIVES **essayist** *noun*.

- ORIGIN Old French *essai* 'trial'; the verb is an alteration of **ASSAY**.

**essence** **noun** **1** the basic or most important feature of something, which determines its character: *conflict is the essence of drama.* **2** an extract obtained from a plant or other substance and used for flavouring or perfume.

- PHRASES **in essence** basically; fundamentally. **of the essence** very important.

- ORIGIN Latin *essentia*, from *esse* 'be'.

**essential** **adjective** **1** absolutely necessary.

- 2** central to the nature of something; fundamental: *the essential weakness of the plaintiff's case.* • **noun** (**essentials**) **1** things that are absolutely necessary. **2** the fundamental elements of something: *the essentials of democracy.*

- DERIVATIVES **essentially** *adverb*.

**essential oil** **noun** a natural oil extracted from a plant.

**EST** **abbreviation** Eastern Standard Time.

**est.** **abbreviation** **1** established. **2** estimated.

**establish** **verb** **1** set something up on a firm or permanent basis. **2** bring about contact or communication with a person, group, or country: *the two countries established diplomatic relations.* **3** make something accepted or recognized by other people: *he had established his reputation as a journalist.*

- 4** discover the facts of a situation or find something out for certain: *investigators are trying to establish the cause of the fire.* **5** (as *adj.*) **established** recognized by the state as the national Church or religion.

- ORIGIN Old French *establiir*, from Latin *stabilire* 'make firm'.

**establishment** **noun** **1** the action of

**outlaw** **noun** **1** a person who has broken the law, especially one who has escaped captivity or is in hiding. **2** historical a person who has been deprived of legal rights or protection. • **verb** **1** make something illegal: *secondary picketing has been outlawed*. **2** historical deprive someone of legal rights or protection.

– DERIVATIVES **outlawry** **noun**.

**outlay** **noun** an amount of money spent.

**outlet** **noun** **1** a pipe or hole through which water or gas may escape. **2** a point from which goods are sold or distributed: *a fast-food outlet*. **3** a means of expressing one's talents, energy, or emotions: *boxing provided a perfect outlet for his aggression*. **4** the mouth of a river. **5** an output socket in an electrical device.

**outlier** /*oʊt-ly-er/* **noun** **1** a thing which is separate or detached from a main body or system. **2** a younger rock formation among older rocks.

**outline** **noun** **1** a drawing or diagram showing the shape of an object. **2** the contours or outer edges of an object. **3** a brief description of the main points of something. • **verb** **1** draw or define the outer edge or shape of something. **2** give a summary of: *she outlined the case briefly*.

**outlive** **verb** live or last longer than someone or something else.

**outlook** **noun** **1** a person's point of view or attitude to life. **2** a view. **3** what is likely to happen in the future.

**outlying** **adjective** situated far from a centre.

**outmanoeuvre** **verb** evade or gain an advantage over an opponent by using skill and cunning.

**outmatch** **verb** be better than someone or something else.

**outmoded** **adjective** old-fashioned.

**outnumber** **verb** be more numerous than: *women outnumbered men by three to one*.

**out-of-body experience** **noun** a sensation of being outside one's body, typically of observing oneself from a distance.

**out-of-court** **adjective** (of a settlement) made without the involvement of a court of law.

**out of date** **adjective** **1** old-fashioned. **2** no longer valid.

**outpace** **verb** go, rise, or improve faster than someone or something else.

**outpatient** **noun** a patient attending a hospital for treatment without staying overnight.

**outperform** **verb** perform better than someone or something else.

**outplacement** **noun** the action of helping workers who have been made redundant to find new employment.

**outplay** **verb** play better than another person or team.

**outpost** **noun** **1** a small military camp at a distance from the main army. **2** a remote part of a country or empire.

**outpouring** **noun** **1** something that streams out rapidly. **2** an outburst of strong emotion: *an outpouring of grief*.

**output** **noun** **1** the amount of something produced. **2** the process of producing something. **3** the power, energy, etc. supplied by a device or system. **4** Electronics a place where

power or information leaves a system. • **verb** (**outputting**; past and past part. **output** or **outputted**) (of a computer) produce data.

**outrage** **noun** **1** an extremely strong reaction of anger, shock, or indignation. **2** an extremely cruel, wicked, or shocking act: *some of the worst terrorist outrages*. • **verb** make someone feel extremely angry, shocked, or indignant.

– ORIGIN Old French, from Latin *ultra* 'beyond'.

**outrageous** **adjective** **1** shockingly bad or unacceptable: *an outrageous waste of time and money*. **2** very unusual and slightly shocking: *her outrageous costumes*.

– DERIVATIVES **outrageously** **adverb**  
**outrageousness** **noun**.

**outran** **past** of **OUTRUN**.

**outrank** **verb** **1** have a higher rank than someone else. **2** be better or more important than something else.

**outré** /*oo-tray/* **adjective** unusual and typically rather shocking.

– ORIGIN French, 'exceeded'.

**outreach** **noun** an organization's involvement with the community, especially in providing a service or advice outside its usual centres of operation.

**outrider** **noun** a person in a vehicle or on horseback who escorts or guards another vehicle.

**outrigger** **noun** **1** a spar or framework projecting from or over a boat's side. **2** a float fixed parallel to a canoe or small ship to help keep it stable. **3** a boat fitted with an outrigger.

**outright** **adverb** **1** altogether: *unions rejected the offer outright*. **2** in an open and direct way. **3** immediately or instantly. • **adjective** **1** open and direct: *an outright refusal*. **2** complete and total: *an outright ban*.

**outrun** **verb** (**outruns**, **outrunning**; past **outran**; past part. **outrun**) **1** run or travel faster or further than someone or something else. **2** go beyond or exceed something.

**outsell** **verb** (past and past part. **outsold**) be sold in greater quantities than another product.

**outset** **noun** the start or beginning.

**outshine** **verb** (past and past part. **outshone**) **1** shine more brightly than something else. **2** be much better than: *his technical expertise far outshone that of his rivals*.

**outside** **noun** **1** the external side or surface of something. **2** the external appearance of someone or something. **3** the side of a bend or curve where the edge is longer. • **adjective** **1** situated on or near the outside. **2** not of or belonging to a particular group, organization, etc.: *outside contractors*. **3** (in hockey, football, etc.) referring to positions nearer to the sides of the field. • **preposition & adverb** **1** situated or moving beyond the boundaries of something. **2** (in hockey, football, etc.) closer to the side of the field than. **3** beyond the limits or scope of something. **4** not being a member of a particular group.

– PHRASES **at the outside** at the most. **an outside chance** a remote possibility.

**outside broadcast** **noun** Brit. a radio or television programme recorded or broadcast live on location.

**stationary** **adjective** **1** not moving. **2** not changing in quantity or condition.

**USAGE:** Do not confuse **stationary** and **stationery**: **stationary** is an adjective meaning 'not moving or changing' (*the lorry crashed into a stationary car*), while **stationery** is a noun meaning 'paper and other writing materials'.

**stationer** **noun** a person who sells stationery.  
– ORIGIN Latin *stationarius* 'tradesman at a fixed location'.

**stationery** **noun** paper and other materials needed for writing.

**stationmaster** **noun** a person in charge of a railway station.

**Station of the Cross** **noun** each of a series of fourteen pictures representing incidents during Jesus's progress from Pilate's house to his crucifixion at Calvary.

**station wagon** **noun** N. Amer. & Austral./NZ an estate car.

**statism** /stay-ti-zuhm/ **noun** a political system in which the state has a great deal of central control over social and economic affairs.

– DERIVATIVES **statist** **noun** & **adjective**.

**statistic** **noun** a fact or piece of data obtained from a study of a large quantity of numerical information.

– ORIGIN German *Statistik*.

**statistical** **adjective** relating to statistics.

– DERIVATIVES **statistically** **adverb**.

**statistics** **plural noun** (treated as *sing.*) the collection and analysis of large quantities of numerical information.

– DERIVATIVES **statistician** **noun**.

**stats** **plural noun** informal statistics.

**statuary** /stat-yoo-ri/ **noun** statues considered as a group.

**statue** **noun** a carved or cast figure of a person or animal, especially one that is life-size or larger.

– ORIGIN Latin *statua*.

**statuesque** /sta-tyu-esk, sta-chuu-esk/ **adjective** (of a woman) attractively tall, graceful, and dignified.

**statuette** **noun** a small statue.

**stature** **noun** **1** a person's natural height when standing. **2** the importance or reputation gained by a person as a result of their ability or achievements: *an architect of international stature*.

– ORIGIN Latin *statura*.

**status** **noun** **1** a person's social or professional standing in relation to other people. **2** high rank or social standing. **3** the situation at a particular time during a process. **4** the official classification given to someone or something.  
– ORIGIN Latin, 'standing'.

**status quo** /stay-tuhss kwoh/ **noun** the existing situation.

– ORIGIN Latin, 'the state in which'.

**status symbol** **noun** a possession seen as an indication of a person's wealth or high social or professional status.

**statute** /sta-tyoot/ **noun** **1** a written law passed by a parliament or other legislative assembly. **2** a rule of an organization or institution.

– ORIGIN Latin *statutum* 'thing set up'.

**statute book** **noun** (the **statute book**) the

whole of a nation's laws.

**statute law** **noun** all the written laws of a parliament, country, etc. considered as a group.

**statute of limitations** **noun** a law which limits the period in which certain kinds of actions can be brought.

**statutory** **adjective** **1** required, permitted, or enacted by law. **2** having come to be required or expected as a result of being done regularly: *the statutory Christmas phone call to his mother*.

– DERIVATIVES **statutorily** **adverb**.

**staunch**<sup>1</sup> /stawnch/ **adjective** very loyal and committed.

– DERIVATIVES **staunchly** **adverb**.

– ORIGIN Old French *estanche* 'watertight'.

**staunch**<sup>2</sup> /stawnch, stawnch/ (US also **stanch**) **verb** stop or restrict the flow of something, especially blood from a wound.

– ORIGIN Old French *estanchier*.

**stave** **noun** **1** any of the lengths of wood fixed side by side to make a barrel, bucket, etc. **2** a strong stick, post, or pole. **3** (also **staff**) Music a set of five parallel lines on or between any of which a note is written to indicate its pitch.

**4** a verse or stanza of a poem. • **verb** **1** (past and past part. **staved** or **stove**) (**stave something in**) break something by forcing it inwards or piercing it roughly. **2** (past and past part. **staved**) (**stave something off**) prevent or delay something undesirable: *emergency measures were introduced to stave off a crisis*.

– ORIGIN from *staves*, former plural of **STAFF**.

**stay**<sup>1</sup> **verb** **1** remain in the same place. **2** remain in a particular state or position: *inflation will stay down*. **3** live somewhere temporarily as a visitor or guest. **4** Scottish & S. African live somewhere permanently. **5** stop, delay, or prevent something. • **noun** **1** a period of staying somewhere. **2** a suspension or postponement of judicial or legal proceedings: *a stay of execution*. **3** (**stays**) historical a corset made of two pieces laced together and stiffened by strips of whalebone.

– PHRASES **stay the course** (or **distance**) **1** keep going to the end of a race or contest.

**2** continue with a difficult task or activity to the end. **stay on** continue to study, work, or be somewhere after others have left. **stay over** stay for the night as a visitor or guest. **stay put** remain somewhere without moving.

– DERIVATIVES **stayer** **noun**.

– ORIGIN Old French *ester*.

**stay**<sup>2</sup> **noun** **1** a large rope, wire, or rod used to support a ship's mast or other upright pole. **2** a supporting wire or cable on an aircraft.  
– ORIGIN Old English.

**staying power** **noun** endurance or stamina.

**staysail** /stay-sayl, stay-suh/ **noun** a triangular sail fastened on a stay.

**STD** **abbreviation** **1** sexually transmitted disease. **2** Brit. subscriber trunk dialling, the automatic connection of trunk (long-distance) calls by dialling without the help of an operator.

**stead** **noun** (in phrase in **someone's/ something's stead**) instead of someone or something: *she was appointed in his stead*.

– PHRASES **stand someone in good stead** be useful to someone over time or in the future.

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# Effective English

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This specially written section of the dictionary provides practical help in writing good English; it aims to help you to improve your basic skills and to write well in a range of situations, enabling you to create a good impression and to get your message across effectively. It is organized in two main sections:

- **Basics of writing good English** deals with basic aspects of the language and gives detailed advice on matters such as categories of words (nouns, verbs, etc.), how you can put these together to form good sentences, and how to use punctuation correctly. To help you choose the right word for the right situation, there are sections on formal and informal language and a list of words which are often confused with each other.
- **Practical writing** shows you how to put these basic English skills into practice in everyday situations, both at work and at home. There are sections on applying for a job, writing at work (for example, writing reports and memos), and general correspondence (such as writing letters of complaint and making insurance claims). Finally, the fast-growing area of electronic communication is covered in the section on emails, texting, and chat rooms.

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# Basics of writing good English

## Introduction

This section deals with the basic features and levels of the English language and how best to combine and select them to write good, clear English that gets your message across in the most effective way. It is divided into three main parts, as follows:

**Grammar and punctuation:** this section has five main units, with examples showing both good and bad writing. The first part sets out the categories of words that go together to form sentences (parts of speech or word classes such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives), and includes advice on such matters as using the correct tenses of verbs and when to use *shall* and *would*. The next section shows how and when nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs change their forms (the process called *inflection*), including guidelines on, for example, which verbs double their final consonant and which verbs don't. In the third section you will see how nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech can be built up into clear and correctly written sentences that convey what you want to say without confusing the reader. The next part shows how to make sure that words within sentences agree with each other (for example, that a singular noun goes with a singular verb), while the final section gives practical guidance on how to use punctuation such as commas and apostrophes accurately and in a way that makes the meaning of your writing easy to understand.

**Formal or informal?** gives guidelines on choosing the right word for the right situation to ensure that the level of language you use is suitable for the type of writing that is required.

**Commonly confused words:** a list of pairs of words that are often confused when people write them down because they sound the same or are spelled in a similar way. The list provides short meanings for each word, so that choosing the right word and avoiding confusion is easy.

If you need more information on writing good English, grammar, or spelling, you may find the following Oxford University Press books helpful: *Oxford Guide to Plain English* (2nd edition, 2004) Martin Cutts; *Oxford A–Z of Spelling* (2004) Catherine Soanes and Sheila Ferguson; *Oxford A–Z of Grammar* (2004) John Seely.