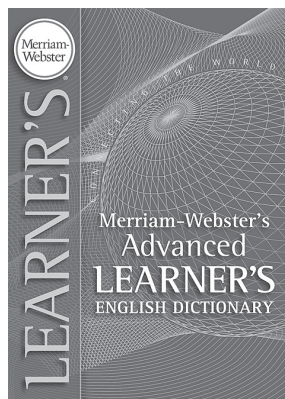


A First Look at Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary

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Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary

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This September, Merriam-Webster will publish *Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary*, the first advanced learner's dictionary from an American publisher. As this article is being written, copy is still being edited, and type still being set, but enough work has been completed that we can offer this first look at the new dictionary.

By way of introduction, we can give the following facts. It will have 100,000 entries (= boldface forms), include more than 12,000 usage notes and paragraphs, and present coverage of 22,000 idioms, collocations, and commonly used phrases. Perhaps most significantly, it will include 160,000 usage examples – to the best of our knowledge, the most usage examples ever offered within the pages of a learner's dictionary.

In constructing this new dictionary, we were of course mindful of the many fine learner's dictionaries that have already been published, and we did ask ourselves what special goals we had for this dictionary. What was it that we could do that would particularly appeal to the English-language learner? We identified five goals:

- User-friendly symbols and abbreviations.
- Comprehensive coverage of American English.
- Very generous use of sample sentences and other usage examples.
- Extensive usage guidance, in the form of labels, notes, and paragraphs.
- Extensive coverage of phrases.

This isn't intended to be a complete list of the features of the dictionary. It also includes many of the features that one sees in other learner's dictionaries – highlighted headwords for core vocabulary items, synonym paragraphs, pronunciations in IPA, a four-color section, a grammar guide – but the five listed above seem especially worthy of note.

User-friendly symbols and abbreviations

Our goal was to make this dictionary as easy to use as possible. To us that meant having as few symbols and abbreviations as possible, requiring the least amount of grammatical sophistication from the user, and ensuring that all symbols and abbreviations be as easy to master as possible.

For verbs we label transitive and intransitive

use, and phrasal verbs are also specifically labeled. For nouns, we label count, noncount, singular, and plural forms. For adjectives and adverbs, we label gradable forms and indicate attributive and postpositive use. Other abbreviations include the common *abbr.*, *prep.*, *interj.*, and *conj.* And there are six other symbols used whose meaning is obvious in context.

Comprehensive coverage of American English

Since this dictionary is the first advanced learner's dictionary from an American publisher, we took as a very important goal to offer the most comprehensive coverage possible of American English. At minimum, we aimed to avoid errors of cultural misunderstanding such as that found in one leading learner's dictionary that equated *stock car racing* with *demolition derby*.

More importantly, we tried to include all vocabulary items from American English that would be appropriate for this dictionary, and in doing so, we identified many that have been missed from other leading learner's dictionaries. A sampling from the first half of the alphabet includes *deadlock* meaning “tie”; *deer tick*; *DEET*; *designee*; *devolve* meaning “to go from an advanced state to a less advanced state”; *double-wide*; *down-and-dirty*; *earth tone*; *elder care*; *family leave*; *fish or cut bait at fish*; *folderol*; *hard-ass*; *harness racing*; *haul ass* and *haul off and at haul*; *heads-up*, noun; *hitch* meaning “period of service in the military”; *hog heaven*; *hoist a few at hoist*; *home fries*; *horn* meaning “telephone”; *horse race* meaning “close race”; *lemon law*; *lily white* meaning “consisting entirely of white people”; *link* as in “sausage link”; *loaner*; *loosey-goosey*; and *lug nut* meaning “the nut that holds the tire onto a car.”

Another aspect of this was to recognize what are the words that aren't commonly used in American English and to ensure that they are properly labeled. A sampling, somewhat shorter, of words to which we assigned a *British* label but often aren't so labeled in other dictionaries includes *depute*; *drover*; *en bloc*; *English breakfast*; *in the event at event*; *ex gratia*; *in the flow at flow*; *gabble*; and *put (someone) out to grass at grass*.

These regional distinctions are usually indicated simply by means of labels, but sometimes notes are added to explain the distinctions, as this note at “lavatory”:

The full version of this article is available online: <http://kdcictionaries.com/kdn/kdn16/kdn16mwaled.html>

In U.S. English, lavatory is most often used for a room in an airplane. • Smoking is not permitted in the airplane's *lavatory*. It may also be used for a room in other kinds of public places. • the school's *lavatories* [= (more commonly) *restrooms*] In British English, *lavatory* is most often used for a room in a public place but may also be used for a room in a home.

We also use illustrations to show the difference. Hence the illustration at *living room* labels the pillows on the sofa as both *throw pillow* (US) and *scatter cushion* (British); the illustration at *lighting fixtures* shows and labels a *floor lamp* but also includes the British term *standard lamp*; and the illustration at *grooming items* shows both *bobby pin* (US) and *hairgrip* (Brit) for the wire holder, and both *barrette* (US) and *hair slide* (Brit) for the holder with a clasp.

Very generous uses of example sentences and other usage devices

Merriam-Webster style rules for all our dictionaries have always strongly encouraged the use of examples both to convey meaning and illustrate typical usage. Given that orientation, we felt that this dictionary should be very well supplied with examples. In fact we went into this believing that well-chosen, carefully crafted examples are the heart and soul of a learner's dictionary. As a result, we created a learner's dictionary with more usage examples between its covers than any other learner's dictionary produced to date. Most are full sentences, but many are phrases when that is sufficient to illustrate the usage. The vast majority are made-up sentences, modeled on actual sentences found in our electronic corpus and other editorial resources, but almost always adapted to remove distracting details and for clarity and concision. There are some quotations, usually from classic works, as the Bible, plays of Shakespeare, the U.S. Constitution, or other well-known works. Many of the usage examples incorporate additional features to help learners. For example, synonymous words and phrases are frequently shown. Compound terms and idiomatic phrases are glossed. Equivalent expressions are indicated, and sometimes entire clauses and sentences are restated in different, simpler terms.

One problem we faced in including 160,000 usage examples was how to set them off. The usual Merriam-Webster practice of enclosing them in angle brackets was not workable, as 160,000 sets of angle brackets is space-consuming and not very attractive. Our solution was to precede each example with a centered dot and to set off the example in blue type. This has

had the additional benefit of highlighting the defining text set in black and serves to make navigating within the entry and searching for a specific sense much easier, especially in long multi-sense entries.

Extensive usage guidance

In preparing this text, we were mindful that learners need more guidance than native speakers in understanding register, idiomatic use, and attitudes about language. Traditionally we handle such matters with italic labels before the definition, notes set off with a dash after the definition, or paragraphs in which usage is described. For this dictionary we used all of these devices, only much more liberally.

Extensive coverage of phrases

Finally, we wanted to give very extensive coverage of phrases, whether as common collocations (usually shown in usage notes and examples but set off in bold italic), idiomatic phrases requiring definition (appearing at the ends of entries or as own-place entries), or simply collocational use of prepositions and adverbs (shown as usage notes).

As a final remark, it should be said that this new learner's dictionary makes use of many of the traditional devices of Merriam-Webster native speakers' dictionaries, but it also pushed us to create new devices to meet the needs of learners and to do a new kind of defining that put a great premium on simple and concise language. One editor working on the project expressed the challenge particularly well:

The biggest challenge of this book has been the need to draw on our previous lexicographical experience and training while at the same time forgetting all about it....

We've had to learn to prioritize simplicity and clarity over *absolute* precision and accuracy, which was a challenge for many of us. And yet the fact that we were reluctant to sacrifice accuracy also served us well. I'm hopeful that what we came up with is something that is clear and simple as well as accurate and precise.

to something dangerous, difficult, etc. — + *with* • The actors were *face to face* with real flames. • She came *face to face* with death. [=she nearly died] • When she visited the school she was brought *face to face* with the problems encountered by teachers every day.

fly in the face of see ¹FLY

game face ✦ In informal U.S. English, if you are *wearing your game face* or *have your game face on*, you have a serious look on your face which shows that you are ready to compete in a game, sport, competition, etc. • He was *wearing his game face* in the finals.

get out of someone's face US, informal : to go away and stop bothering someone : to leave someone alone • *Get out of my face!* • Hey, *get out of your sister's face* and go play somewhere else!

in someone's face **1** : in a direct way that shows anger or disrespect for someone • She laughed *in his face*. • He slammed the door *in my face*. **2** ✦ In informal U.S. English, if you *are/get in someone's face*, you are criticizing or shouting at someone in a very direct and angry way. • The coach *got in my face* because I was late for practice. — see also IN-YOUR-FACE

in the face of : while in a situation in which you have to deal with (something or someone that is dangerous, difficult, etc.) • Their defeat seemed certain *in the face of* such a powerful opponent. • She showed great courage *in the face of* danger. [=she showed great courage when she was faced with danger] • She succeeded *in the face of* [=despite] great difficulties.

just another face in the crowd see ²CROWD

laugh on the other side of your face see ¹LAUGH

lose face : to cause other people to have less respect for you : to lose other people's respect • She was afraid that she would *lose face* if she admitted her mistake.

make a face or chiefly Brit **pull a face** **1** : to make a facial expression that shows dislike or disgust • He *made a face* when I mentioned her name. **2** : to make a silly or amusing facial expression • She tried to get me to laugh by *making a face* when I looked at her. • He was entertaining the children by *making* (funny) *faces*.

pretty face see ¹PRETTY

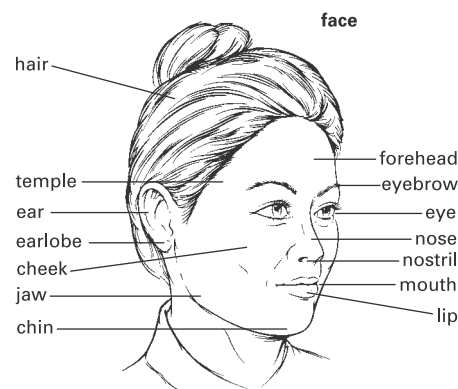
put a human face on see ¹HUMAN

save face : to avoid having other people lose respect for you • He tried to *save face* by working overtime to meet the deadline.

shut your face see ¹SHUT

stuff your face see ²STUFF

to someone's face : directly to someone • If you have something to say about me, you should say it *to my face*. [=say it directly to me rather than to someone else]



ce verb **fac-es**; **faced**; **fac-ing**

f a : to stand or sit with your face and body turned toward something or someone) [+ *obj*] The teacher *faced* the class. • She turned around to *face* the window. • He sat *facing* the wall. [*no obj*] Now turn and *face* to the east. **b** : to have the front part toward (something) • The house *faces* the park. • The living room *faces* the afternoon sun. [*no obj*] My shoe was lying in the corner with its sole *facing* upward. • The lower opens *facing* skyward. **c** : to be on the page that is opposite to (another page) [+ *obj*] Look at the illustration that *faces* page 132. = Look at the illustration *facing* page

a column from
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