



Reference Books

This handout originated many years ago in response to requests from students, most of them at Konstanz University. Students from many different departments asked me for advice on dictionaries, both monolingual and translation, and on grammar books, which to use, which to buy. The recommendations I made were based on my experience and on the availability of the books in the University library. The most important and most frequently used were placed on reserve, and in some cases multiple copies were ordered for loan, under *fse*, *eng*, *lbs* etc.

Since then the electronic media have greatly changed the way we look for information, work with it and store it. The question arises whether there is any point in recommending reference books in print form. I think there is, and have retained many of the titles from the original list as I believe they are still reliable 'tools' for learning English. They are all in the library.

This handout is divided into:

- (1) English-English dictionaries (dictionaries for all learners; dictionaries for advanced learners and native speakers)
- (2) Translation dictionaries German-English (general; special areas)
- (3) Other useful reference books for students of English
- (4) Grammar books

Please note that there are many good dictionaries from various publishers available on the market and in the library **e.g.** Collins, Oxford, Cambridge, Macmillan, Longman Langenscheidt.

(1) English-English Dictionaries

These are divided here into two groups: dictionaries which are good for non-native speakers at all levels; dictionaries which are aimed more at very advanced learners and native speakers.

For all learners:

The one below is my personal recommendation based on many years experience of working with it.

Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 6th edition, Glasgow, 2009 (Print version with CD-ROM attached) or newer.
(Now also online at www.mycobuild.com)

The name of this dictionary changes slightly with each new edition, but the 'Collins Cobuild' is an essential part.

I recommend it for **all** learners (and teachers), and worked with it in many of my classes, from Writing, Reading, Translating or Study Skills, to Fiction and Film classes. Students brought their own copy to class every week and made good use of it there. They also used it for their homework, whether writing, reading, translating, or preparing presentations.

This dictionary, like all good learners' dictionaries, has all **the kinds of information that learners need**, e.g. count/uncount nouns; verb patterns; level of formality; collocations. To help students get the most out of it I use dictionary quizzes at the beginning of term. Two of these are available at FindYourFeet.de. After all, the best tool in the world is not much good if you don't know how to use it.

I would often get phone calls or emails from staff members in other parts of the university with a question about English. Very often that question could have been answered with the help of a good learner's dictionary.

For advanced learners and native speakers:

Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1993 (Print version) new edition 2011

Collins Electronic English Dictionary and Thesaurus CD-ROM, 1996
(Both now also online)

This English dictionary has **more words** than the Collins Cobuild, but **less information on use**.

The *Thesaurus* means that at the bottom of every page you will find a separate entry for some of the words on that page, with synonyms. For example, on the page where you find "increase" you will find at the bottom the word "increase" again, but this time with a list of words which have a similar meaning e.g. add to, amplify, build up, boost. This makes learners aware of the range of words with a similar meaning, but it does not give information on slight differences in meaning or on the actual use. Learners still need to take the next step and check the exact definition and the use. For this the Cobuild is best.

Webster's Third New international Dictionary of the English language, 2002
This is a dictionary based on American English. (Now also online)

Oxford Advanced Learners Encyclopedic Dictionary. The ideal study dictionary for language and culture, 1995, 1997
(Now also online)

If you are still puzzled by the division here of English-English dictionaries into “for all learners” and “for advanced learners and native speakers”:

In general, the latter have more words, but less of the information on use that the non-native speaker needs. For example, a native speaker of English knows that 'a game' (count noun) has a completely different meaning from 'game' (uncount noun), or that 'stop to do something' means something very different from 'stop doing something'. A learner does not have this knowledge, and is happy to get it from a good dictionary. (Test your dictionary and see if it helps you!)

So, briefly, you really need a good “for learners” dictionary for writing your own texts and for general reading; you might need a dictionary from the other category for reading specialised texts.

(2) Translation Dictionaries

There are many good translation dictionaries on the market and in the library. This is a small selection.

General translation dictionaries:

Collins German-English, English-German Dictionary (1 volume) 1997

(Writers, see the centre pages!)

As above, with CD-ROM, 2001

(Now also online)

Pons Collins Grosswörterbuch für Experten und Universität Deutsch-Englisch, Englisch-Deutsch, 1997, 2000

(Now also online)

Pons Collins Handwörterbuch (1 volume), 1995, 1998

Langenscheidts Grosswörterbuch (2 volumes), 1988, 2008

(Now also online)

Langenscheidts Enzyklopädisches Wörterbuch (4 volumes), 1987, 2003

(Now available with CD-ROM)

Duden-Oxford-Bildwörterbuch Deutsch und Englisch, 1994

This is brilliant as it has illustrations of a wide range of things, and gives the English words and the German. Obviously there are things now which were not yet in existence when this was first published, but many things have remained the same.

Some special area translation dictionaries:

Der Kleine Eichborn. Wirtschaft und Wirtschaftsrecht, 1997, 2002

Der Grosse Eichborn, Wirtschaft, Recht, Verwaltung, Verkehr, 1981-82, 2003
(According to the publisher's website (Siebenpunkt Verlag) in March 2014 the online version is coming soon.)

The Compact Dictionary of Exact Science and Technology.
Volume 1 English-German, 1989; *Volume 2 German-English*, 1982, 2005

There are other special area dictionaries in the library, both English-English and translation dictionaries: Science, Business, Marketing, Literary terms and text interpretation etc.

Using online translation dictionaries:

Of course, if you are working at the computer you can use an online dictionary to help you find the translation of a word. Many of the big publishers offer access to their own translation dictionaries online e.g. Longman Langenscheidt, Collins, Oxford.

There are also many websites offering translations online. But be very careful: these websites vary greatly in quality. In most cases you will still need an English-English dictionary to check if this really is the word you need and how to use the word properly. If you skip that step, you may end up writing absolute (sometimes very funny) nonsense!

You can check the value of some of these websites yourself by testing them with a set of words. (One or two from my set are: Fachschaft, Wohnheim, Schutzgeld, Fachhochschule.)

The European Union has a website dedicated to translation and drafting resources. It will lead you for example to www.iate.europa.eu and www.dict.tu-chemnitz.de.

PS: Students of English learn various strategies for translating (German into English) in Translating Skills classes, so they don't need to resort to a translation dictionary very often. These strategies include: paraphrasing the German (e.g. what is the meaning of 'Fachschaft', is it a thing, what does it do?); reading authentic texts in English (e.g. if you don't know the English word for Studentenwohnheim you can go to the website of any university in an English speaking country and find out); using an English-English dictionary carefully.

(3) Others

Students of English, have a look sometime, and see what these books have to offer you. You might be surprised. Don't be put off by the publication date of these books as they still have useful things to say, and there will probably be more recent editions of them in the library. Some are now available online too.

Longman Language Activator. The World's First Production Dictionary, 1993, 2003

Adverbien und Partikeln. Ein Deutsch-Englisches Wörterbuch, 1990

Longman Synonym Dictionary, 1990

Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English, 1983, 1988 (this is NOT about idioms!)

Longman Guide to English Usage, 1988, 1996

BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English: your guide to collocations and grammar, 1986, 1997

Pons English Idioms Dictionary, 1993, 1994

Pons American Idioms Dictionary, 1993, 1994

Oxford Dictionary of New Words. A popular guide to words in the news, 1991, 1997
(also online at www.oxforddictionaries.com)

Collins Cobuild Key Words in the Media / in Science and Technology / in Business. 1997 (series of 3 books).

(4) Grammar

English Grammar in Use, 1995, 2013

This is a really useful **intermediate** level grammar, with exercises and a key. It is a good idea to work through it, and check that you understand the basics.

A Communicative Grammar of English, 1994, 2002

An advanced level grammar, with clear explanations. It has a part which deals with concepts such as frequency, duration, and how these are expressed in English, and a part which deals with grammar categories like adjectives, pronouns, questions.

Meaning and the English Verb, 1987, 1997

This focuses, obviously, on the verb, which means tense (present, past etc), aspect (simple form v. progressive form) and modality (could, may, should etc).

Some students have said they found the following useful:

Englische Grammatik von A-Z, 1997

Grammatik des heutigen Englisch. 1984, 1996

Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English, 1999, 2002

Practical English Usage (a practical reference book on grammar/vocabulary), 1984, 2008

The next two grammars are definitely large, comprehensive and written by the same team, with advanced learners in mind:

A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language, 1992

A University Grammar of English, 1987

Finally, I would advise **all** learners of English to buy a good English-English dictionary. It is the basic tool required for anyone whose mother tongue is not English. It is also a wonderful assistant for teachers, whether native speakers or not. If learners are helped and encouraged to use the dictionary effectively this is a major step on the path to being an independent learner.

I personally prefer the print version as I find that the physical structure of the book and the layout of each page help the memory. The more the book is used the more familiar it becomes, and the user can highlight words or passages, draw on it, add words and comments, personalise it. It requires no electricity, no batteries, no Wi-Fi. Even 21st century 'digitalised' students are happy to use the print version. Since the Cobuild, and other similar dictionaries have a CD-ROM attached, you have the best of both worlds.

Those still struggling to enlarge their vocabulary may want to also have a good translation dictionary of their own, whether in print or on CD-ROM. Looking at those available in the library can help you decide.

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