

# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Why Teach Dictionary Skills in the 21st Century?

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books, recipe books, and more. Once students understand the layout of a dictionary, they will be able to find information in other reference books and feel comfortable doing so. The dictionary organizes words alphabetically and groups them together using *guide words*. If your child is proficient with the alphabet, he/she will be able to understand how to use the dictionary competently and eventually transfer those dictionary skills when using other resource books in later grades.



With the lightning-speed advancement of computer technology in the last decade, today's children can manipulate the keys of a computer keyboard and use programs on a hard drive with as much skill and finesse as some adults. When we use a word processor on a computer to write essays, reports, research papers, or letters, the processor can highlight misspellings, correct grammar and sentence structure, predict the word we are trying to write, or sometimes choose a better word! It even provides us with synonyms, antonyms, and word origin. Why, then, should we continue to teach the antiquated skill of using a paper-filled dictionary to help us read and write, when most of the information we need is readily available within seconds at the click of a mouse? There is one huge reason...

***Basic dictionary skills transfer to the use of other reference books that students will use in the future to conduct research or find information.***



Dictionaries are the first reference books we learn to use. Learning to use the dictionary also teaches us the basics for using a thesaurus, encyclopedias, periodicals, phone



Using a paper dictionary helps students acquire a broader vocabulary, teaches correct spelling and spelling patterns, and fosters reading comprehension. Looking up just one word in a dictionary inadvertently exposes a student to many other words, meanings, uses, and other information. This is not the case with most electronic dictionaries where only one word or a list of words (possibly not in the same context) may appear to the user.





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## Teaching the Basics of Dictionary Skills to Your Children



Practice dictionary skills at home with a picture, beginner, elementary, or children's dictionary. A collegiate dictionary is too overwhelming for elementary students! Before you

begin practicing at home, teach your child that *all* dictionaries:

- Have words entered in alphabetical order. Each word is an **entry**—the entry lists the word in syllables (illustrated with dots or spacing), its pronunciation or phonetic spelling (the spelling of how to pronounce the word when spoken), its part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, etc.), and its definition(s). Most dictionaries provide example sentences for each part of speech the word represents in its context: **cook** - The **cook** (noun) works in the kitchen. Mother can **cook** (verb) well. The basketball team knows how to **cook** (slang - verb)!
- Have one or two **guide words** at the top of every page. The guide words help users find words in a dictionary quickly. The guide words are an alphabetical "tag," meaning the word being searched for falls *alphabetically* between the two

guide words (or may be one of the guide words). Some dictionaries have one guide word on the *left* page and one on the *right* page. The left page guide word is always the *first* entry word on that page, and the right page guide word is always the *last* entry word on the right page. Some larger dictionaries have a pair of guide words on every page. The user flips through the dictionary pages for the first letter of the entry word and searches for the pair of guide words that the entry word will appear between alphabetically. For example, the word "greed" would appear on the page with the guide words **great–green**.



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