

This guide to dictionaries is excerpted (with permission) from *A Guide to Writing Resources*. That publication is available online at the TROY Global Campus Library site <http://uclibrary.troy.edu> in the *Information and Help* section.

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Dictionaries

"Dictionaries are like watches; the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true." *Samuel Johnson*

Dictionaries are word tools that can be used to check a word's spelling, pronunciation, capitalization, usage, division, function, and history. As far as affordable, collegiate dictionaries go, there is a small handful of choices. In looking for a dictionary, bear in mind that the word *Webster's* is not, in and of itself, copyrighted; so you will find numerous *Webster's* dictionaries out there, so don't buy just any one. There is one "real" *Webster's*, and a few other good ones that bear the *Webster's* name.

A first-rate (and entertaining) review of collegiate dictionaries, "Word Up: Which dictionary is the best?", by YiLing Chen-Josephson, can be found online at <http://www.slate.com/id/2091949>

For recommendations on electronic dictionaries, refer to the information on *electronic thesauri*, presented in the aforementioned publication, *A Guide to Writing Resources*.

Of note: Unlike most other dictionaries, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* and *Webster's New World College Dictionary* both present definitions historically (old to new), instead of the by most common usage first.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. If you don't want to spend time shopping around, it is hard to go wrong with this one. This is the "real" Webster's—the descendent of Noah Webster's original 1828 edition. See "Of note," above. Many entries include not only place of origin (when known or of importance) for many words, but also the date of origin. List price \$22; new and used copies are available for \$15 or less. Available for a few dollars more is an edition that includes a CD-ROM version of the dictionary.

Oxford American College Dictionary. Includes a greater number of biographical references than many other collegiate dictionaries. Includes references for numerous phrases, e.g., under the entry for the word *strut*, is a phrase entry for *strut your stuff*. Unlike *Merriam-Webster's*, most words do not include historical data, i.e., country and date of the origin of the word. New and used copies are \$20 or less. Suggestion: This dictionary is a pared-down version of the more extensive (and expensive) *New Oxford American Dictionary* (list price \$60 for the 2nd edition [2005]). A budget-conscious choice would be a used (\$20) copy of the 2nd edition or even of the 1st edition, 2001 (\$10 or less).

Webster's New World College Dictionary. A solid, straightforward dictionary. See "Of note," above. List price \$25; new and used copies are available for \$17 or less. Available for a few dollars more is an edition that includes a CD-ROM dictionary and thesaurus.

Random House Webster's College Dictionary. A solid, straightforward dictionary. Common meanings are presented first. Includes a CD-ROM version of the dictionary. List price \$27; new and used copies are available for \$18 or less.

American Heritage College Dictionary. A solid, straightforward dictionary. Common meanings are presented first. Includes numerous photographs and drawings. Includes a CD-ROM version of the dictionary. List price \$27; new and used copies are available for \$18 or less. Used copies of the current (4th) edition) without the CD-ROM are about \$7.



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