

Amy Kasten's Guide to Consulting Vocabulary Reference Materials



One of the really cool ways that technology is changing our world is by breaking down language barriers and making it possible for people to understand almost any word in any language. If you're taking this course, it means that you have access to a computer and the Internet, which also means that you have a whole world of vocabulary-building reference tools at your fingertips. However, not long ago the Internet wasn't as widely available and people had to rely on dictionaries and thesauruses. This document is meant to give

you a quick look at some reference sources that can be used specifically for locating information on word meanings and parts. There are certainly other ways to learn about words not covered here, but **the goal is that by the end of this lesson, you can identify at least four specific resources that exist to help you build your vocabulary.**

1. **DICTIONARY:** A dictionary is one of the best books for finding word meanings. It is organized in alphabetical order and includes information about word meanings, which part of speech the word is, different forms that a word can take, and an example of the word in a sentence. All different types of dictionaries exist – some for children, some for adults – but they are all organized in the same way.
2. **THESAURUS:** A thesaurus is another resource for finding word meanings. Thesauruses are also organized in alphabetical order and are different from dictionaries because they provide other words that mean the same thing as the entry word (synonyms) as well as words that mean the opposite (antonyms). A thesaurus is a great tool to use if you want to find more sophisticated-sounding words or new ways to say something.
3. **GLOSSARY:** Glossaries are not reference books by themselves, but are actually a section found at the end of most nonfiction and some fiction texts. Glossaries are like dictionaries, but they only include a list of words that related to the topic of the text in which they are included.
4. **ONLINE REFERENCE SOURCES:** There are endless numbers of online dictionaries and thesauruses that you can access by simply opening your Internet browser and conducting a search for “online dictionary” or “online thesaurus.” Some sites are better than others, and since anything can be published on the Internet, it would be smart of you to double check the a word's meaning you find in one dictionary on a second site to be sure you're getting correct information. Many word-processing programs also include dictionary and thesaurus features, so these are worth exploring as well.