

Using Dictionaries and Thesauruses Effectively

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 10



Quick Review

Match the TOOL to the question. A **dictionary** gives definitions, pronunciation, part of speech, and example sentences — use it when you need to know what a word means or how to say it. A **thesaurus** gives synonyms and antonyms — use it when you have a word but want a more precise or vivid one. A **glossary** lives at the back of a textbook and defines special terms as that book uses them. When a dictionary lists more than one meaning, use the **part of speech** and the **context of the sentence** to pick the right entry. With a thesaurus, never grab the first synonym — always check that it actually fits your sentence.

PRACTICE

Choose the **BEST** answer for each item about using reference materials.

1. Imagine this dictionary entry:

resolve /rɪˈzɒlv/ verb 1. to make a firm decision about something. 2. to settle (a dispute) by agreement. 3. (technical) to separate into clear parts, as a lens resolves an image.

Which definition **BEST** fits this sentence? *After hours of argument, the two neighbors finally **resolved** their dispute over the fence.*

- A. definition 1
- B. definition 2
- C. definition 3
- D. none of the definitions

2. You wrote: *The room was nice.* A thesaurus offers these synonyms for **nice**: *pleasant, polite, cozy, respectable.* Which would **BEST** replace **nice** if you want to suggest a warm, comfortable feeling?

- A. pleasant
- B. polite
- C. respectable
- D. cozy

3. You are reading a sixth-grade science textbook and find the word **photosynthesis** in bold for the first time. To find the meaning the textbook expects you to know, the **BEST** place to look **FIRST** is —

- A. an online encyclopedia.
- B. a general thesaurus.
- C. the book's glossary.
- D. a printed dictionary.



4. Imagine this dictionary entry:

bank¹ *noun* 1. a place that holds money. 2. a row of similar things (a bank of computers).

bank² *noun* the land along the side of a river or lake.

bank³ *verb* to tilt a vehicle when turning.

Which entry fits this sentence? *The pilot had to **bank** the small plane sharply to clear the mountainside.*

- A. bank³
- B. bank¹, definition 1
- C. bank¹, definition 2
- D. bank²

5. Lin wants a more vivid word than *walked* in this sentence: *After winning the race, Daniel **walked** to the trophy table.* Her thesaurus lists: *strode, trudged, shuffled, limped.* Which BEST fits the situation?

- A. trudged
- B. strode
- C. shuffled
- D. limped

6. Which question is BEST answered by a **dictionary** rather than a thesaurus?

- A. What is a more vivid word for *happy*?
- B. Is *cold* an antonym of *hot*?
- C. How is *colonel* pronounced?
- D. What is another way to say *begin*?

7. Imagine this dictionary entry:

refrain /rɪˈfreɪn/ 1. *verb* to hold back from doing something. 2. *noun* a line or phrase that is repeated, especially in a song.

In which sentence does **refrain** match **definition 1**?

- A. Please **refrain** from talking during the concert.
- B. The song's **refrain** repeats after every verse.
- C. We all joined in on the **refrain**.
- D. She added a new **refrain** to the chorus.

8. Anjali wrote: *The villain was a really bad person.* She wants a more powerful synonym for **bad**. Her thesaurus lists: *unwell, naughty, mistaken, wicked.* Which best fits the sentence?

- A. unwell
- B. naughty
- C. mistaken
- D. wicked



9. Imagine you are reading and meet this sentence: *The senator made one final **address** before stepping down.* A dictionary lists three meanings for *address*: (1) the place where someone lives (noun); (2) a formal speech (noun); (3) to direct words to someone (verb). Which numbered definition fits the sentence, and how do you know? Use the PART OF SPEECH and the SENTENCE CONTEXT in your answer.

10. Your friend wrote this sentence: *The puppy was very small.* Her thesaurus lists these synonyms for **small**: *tiny, petite, miniature, runty.* (a) Which would you recommend to make the sentence sound warm and affectionate? (b) Which would make the puppy sound weak or unhealthy? (c) Explain in one sentence why a writer should not just grab the first synonym from a thesaurus.



Answer Keys

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Explanations	
1. B	The sentence describes two neighbors ending a dispute by agreement, which is exactly definition 2 . A is the <i>make a decision</i> sense (no decision is described here). C is the technical optics sense (no lens). D ignores a clear match.
2. D	Cozy carries the warm, comfortable feeling for a <i>room</i> . A (<i>pleasant</i>) is correct but generic. B (<i>polite</i>) describes a person's manners, not a room. C (<i>respectable</i>) describes social standing, not comfort. This is the classic thesaurus trap: every word is a synonym for <i>nice</i> in some sense, but only one fits the context.
3. C	A textbook's glossary defines key terms with the exact meaning the book uses, often shorter and more focused than a general source. A may give too much detail and may not match the textbook. B gives synonyms, not a definition. D gives a general definition but might miss how the textbook frames it.
4. A	In the sentence, <i>bank</i> describes what the pilot DOES to the plane — it is a verb meaning to tilt when turning , matching bank ³ . B (money place) and C (row of things) are noun senses with no fit. D (river bank) is also a noun and doesn't describe an action by the pilot.
5. B	Winning the race gives Daniel confidence, so strode (walked with long, confident steps) fits perfectly. A <i>trudged</i> = walked heavily as if tired or unhappy — the opposite of how a winner feels. C <i>shuffled</i> = dragged the feet — lazy or weak. D <i>limped</i> = walked because of an injury. All four are real synonyms for <i>walked</i> , but only one matches the context.
6. C	A dictionary gives pronunciation (here, /nɪkʰr.nɪl/), so C is the right tool. A and D ask for synonyms — a thesaurus is the right tool. B asks for an antonym — also a thesaurus job. The line between the two tools is the key idea of this lesson.
7. A	A uses <i>refrain</i> as a verb meaning hold back from doing something — the part of speech and the context both match definition 1. B, C, and D all use the noun sense (a repeated song line), so they fit definition 2 instead.
8. D	Wicked matches the meaning <i>morally bad</i> that fits a villain. A <i>unwell</i> means sick. B <i>naughty</i> is mild and used for misbehaving children. C <i>mistaken</i> means in error, not evil. Every choice is a real synonym for <i>bad</i> in SOME sense, but only one captures the right shade for a villain.
9.	Answer: Definition 2 fits: <i>here is a noun meaning a formal speech</i> . The clue <i>made one final</i> tells you the word is a noun (you can <i>make a speech</i>) and the context — a senator stepping down — points to a formal speech, not a home address (1) or the verb sense (3).
10.	Answer: (a) <i>Tiny</i> (or <i>petite</i>) sounds warm and affectionate — it suggests <i>cute and small</i> . (b) <i>Runty</i> suggests weak or unhealthy — the smallest of a litter, often used as criticism. (c) A writer should not grab the first synonym because synonyms share a DENOTATION but differ in <i>connotation</i> and context fit; the wrong synonym can change the meaning or tone of the whole sentence.



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