

Using Reference Materials Effectively

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 10



Quick Review

Pick the TOOL to match the question. A **dictionary** gives denotation, pronunciation, part of speech, and etymology — use it when you need a precise meaning, a pronunciation, or a word's origin. A **thesaurus** gives synonyms and antonyms — but never grab the first synonym; always test it in your sentence. A **glossary** at the back of a textbook defines subject-specific terms the way that book uses them. A digital tool is only as good as its source: prefer **authoritative** references (Merriam-Webster, Oxford, university-published glossaries) over user-edited or anonymous sites. The **etymology** entry — the part of a dictionary entry that traces a word's origin — can confirm a root or affix you already suspect.

PRACTICE

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

1. Imagine this dictionary entry:

temper /ˈtɛm.pər/ 1. *noun* a person's state of mind in terms of anger or calm. 2. *verb* to soften the effect of something. 3. *verb* (technical) to harden a metal by heat treatment.

Which definition **BEST** fits this sentence? *The judge's wise comments helped **temper** the anger in the courtroom.*

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

2. You wrote: *The general's plan was good.* A thesaurus lists these synonyms for **good**: *moral, skilled, kind, shrewd.* Which would **BEST** replace **good** if you want to praise the plan as clever and strategically sharp?

- A. moral
- B. kind
- C. skilled
- D. shrewd

3. You are reading a Grade 7 life-science textbook and meet the word **mitochondria** in bold for the first time. To find the meaning your textbook expects you to know, the **BEST** place to look **FIRST** is —

- A. a general-interest blog about science topics.
- B. a printed thesaurus.
- C. the textbook's glossary at the back of the book.
- D. a free user-edited online encyclopedia.



4. Imagine this dictionary entry:

pitch¹ *noun* 1. the level of highness or lowness of a sound. 2. a persuasive sales presentation.

pitch² *verb* to throw, especially in baseball.

pitch³ *noun* a thick black sticky substance used for waterproofing.

Which entry fits this sentence? *The sales team prepared a careful **pitch** for the investors on Friday.*

- A. pitch¹, definition 2
- B. pitch¹, definition 1
- C. pitch²
- D. pitch³

5. Imagine this dictionary entry:

incense [pronounced *IN-sens*] *noun* a substance burned for its pleasant smell.

incense [pronounced *in-SENS*] *verb* to make someone very angry.

Which sentence uses **incense** as the VERB?

- A. Lighting the incense gave the room a calming scent.
- B. The mayor's careless remarks were sure to incense the protesters.
- C. The incense in the temple burned slowly for hours.
- D. She bought a stick of incense at the gift shop.

6. Lin wants a more vivid word than *looked* in this sentence: *After hearing the false rumor about her, Priya **looked** at her cousin in stunned silence.* Her thesaurus lists: *peered, glanced, glared, stared.*

Which BEST fits the situation?

- A. peered
- B. glanced
- C. stared
- D. glared

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

- A. What is the etymology of *algebra*?
- B. What is a more formal word for *boss*?
- C. What is an antonym for *generous*?
- D. What is a synonym for *fast*?

8. You are deciding between two online sources for the definition of the domain-specific term **gerrymander**. Which source is MOST AUTHORITATIVE?

- A. a stranger's reply in an open social-media thread.
- B. an unsigned blog post that copies text from elsewhere.
- C. the first auto-suggested result on any search engine.
- D. the entry on Merriam-Webster.com.



9. Imagine you are reading and meet this sentence: *The ambassador's first formal **address** set the tone for the talks that followed.* A dictionary lists three meanings for *address*: (1) the place where someone lives (noun); (2) a formal speech (noun); (3) to direct words or attention to (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: *The detective was very smart.* Her thesaurus lists synonyms for **smart**: *shrewd, cunning, brilliant, clever.* (a) Which would best suggest *clever in a slightly sneaky way*? (b) Which would best suggest *unusually intelligent, on a high level*? (c) Explain in one sentence why a writer should consult both a thesaurus AND a dictionary before substituting a synonym.



Answer Keys

- 1 A B C D
- 2 A B C D
- 3 A B C D
- 4 A B C D
- 5 A B C D

- 6 A B C D
- 7 A B C D
- 8 A B C D
- 9
- 10

Explanations


1. B	In the sentence, <i>temper</i> is a verb meaning to soften the effect of the anger — definition 2 . A is the noun sense (the anger itself, not the action). C is the metallurgy sense (no metal, no heat). D ignores a clear match. The part of speech and the context together fix the entry.
2. D	Shrewd means <i>cleverly aware and strategically sharp</i> — exactly the praise you want for a general's plan. A <i>moral</i> describes ethics, not cleverness. B <i>kind</i> describes warmth, also not strategic. C <i>skilled</i> applies to a PERSON's ability, not a PLAN. All four are synonyms for <i>good</i> in some sense, but only one fits the precise context.
3. C	A textbook's glossary defines key terms with the exact meaning the book uses, calibrated to the grade and the chapter. A may be unreliable and may not match the textbook. B gives synonyms, not a definition — and <i>mitochondria</i> doesn't have everyday synonyms. D may be inaccurate or written above grade level; for a domain term, the textbook glossary is the authoritative first stop.
4. A	In the sentence, <i>pitch</i> is a noun meaning a persuasive sales presentation , matching pitch¹, definition 2 . B (the sound sense) is also a noun but doesn't fit a sales meeting. C (throw) is a verb — the wrong part of speech. D (a sticky substance) is a noun but unrelated to investors. Part of speech plus context resolve the entry.
5. B	B uses <i>incense</i> as a verb meaning <i>to make very angry</i> — the protesters are the ones being angered. A, C, and D all use the noun sense (a substance burned for its scent). Notice the dictionary even marks the pronunciation shift, signaling two different words. Part of speech is the key.
6. C	Stared — a long, fixed, often emotional look — fits <i>stunned silence</i> perfectly. A <i>peered</i> means <i>looked closely, often with effort to see</i> (squinting at small print). B <i>glanced</i> means <i>looked quickly</i> — the opposite of stunned silence. D <i>glared</i> adds open hostility, which the sentence doesn't support (Priya is stunned, not yet angry). All four are real synonyms for <i>looked</i> , but only one fits.
7. A	Only a dictionary (or its etymology entry) traces a word's origin — <i>algebra</i> comes from Arabic <i>al-jabr</i> , meaning <i>the reunion of broken parts</i> . B asks for a synonym (thesaurus). C asks for an antonym (thesaurus). D also asks for a synonym (thesaurus). The rule of thumb: meaning, pronunciation, and origin go to the dictionary; synonyms and antonyms go to the thesaurus.
8. D	Merriam-Webster is a major published dictionary with editorial oversight; its definition is the authoritative choice. A relies on a stranger with no credentials. B has no author and recycles unverified text. C confuses <i>top result</i> with <i>reliable result</i> — search rankings reflect popularity, not accuracy. Choosing a strong source is part of using reference materials well.



9.	Answer: Definition 2 fits: <i>address</i> here is a noun meaning <i>a formal speech</i> . The clue <i>first formal</i> shows it is a noun (formal modifies a thing), and the context <i>an ambassador speaking to open talks</i> points to a formal speech, not a home address (1) or the verb sense (3). Substituting <i>formal speech</i> into the sentence keeps the meaning intact.
10.	Answer: (a) Cunning suggests cleverness with a slight edge of slyness or scheming. (b) Brilliant suggests unusually high intelligence, far above average. (c) A writer should consult both because a thesaurus shows candidate synonyms but only the dictionary confirms each candidate's denotation , part of speech , and connotation , so the substituted word fits the exact context.



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