

# 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:

**pitch**<sup>1</sup> *noun* 1. the level of highness or lowness of a sound. 2. a persuasive sales presentation.

**pitch**<sup>2</sup> *verb* to throw, especially in baseball.

**pitch**<sup>3</sup> *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. pitch<sup>1</sup>, definition 2
- B. pitch<sup>1</sup>, definition 1
- C. pitch<sup>2</sup>
- D. pitch<sup>3</sup>

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.

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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.

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## 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

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| <b>1. B</b> | In the sentence, <i>temper</i> is a <b>verb</b> meaning <b>to soften the effect of</b> the anger — <b>definition 2</b> . 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.   |
| <b>2. D</b> | <b>Shrewd</b> 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.  |
| <b>3. C</b> | A textbook's <b>glossary</b> 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.  |
| <b>4. A</b> | In the sentence, <i>pitch</i> is a noun meaning <b>a persuasive sales presentation</b> , matching <b>pitch<sup>1</sup>, definition 2</b> . 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.  |
| <b>5. B</b> | <b>B</b> uses <i>incense</i> as a <b>verb</b> 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.   |
| <b>6. C</b> | <b>Stared</b> — 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. |
| <b>7. A</b> | Only a <b>dictionary</b> (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.  |
| <b>8. D</b> | <b>Merriam-Webster</b> is a major published dictionary with editorial oversight; its definition is the <b>authoritative</b> 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.  |



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| 9.  | <b>Answer:</b> Definition <b>2</b> fits: <i>address</i> here is a <b>noun</b> meaning <i>a formal speech</i>. The clue <i>first formal</i> shows it is a noun (formal modifies a thing), and the context &mdash; an ambassador speaking to open talks &mdash; 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. | <b>Answer:</b> (a) <b>Cunning</b> suggests cleverness with a slight edge of slyness or scheming. (b) <b>Brilliant</b> 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 <b>denotation</b>, <b>part of speech</b>, and <b>connotation</b>, so the substituted word fits the exact context. |



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