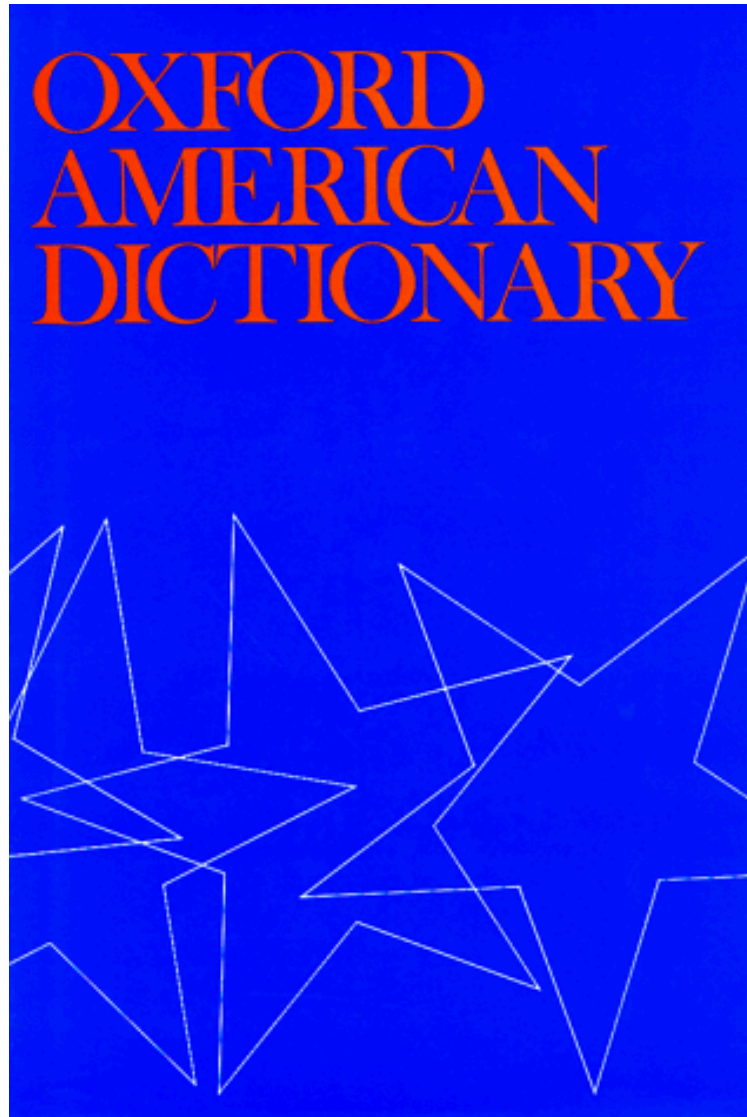


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Oxford American Dictionary

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use it often, and they do not have much difficulty understand the meaning of words. I think it has very concise definitions with simple language. 13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Compact and Indispensable By P. A. Roy

Need a small, lucid dictionary for looking up words and checking pronunciations? The Oxford American Dictionary (OAD) may be precisely what you need. Then again, it may not; it depends on what you value in a dictionary. It is important, first, to note that there are essentially two types of dictionaries. Hardcover dictionaries are often large, cumbersome, and not at all portable. Their seemingly excessive size is spent on comprehensive definitions and large numbers of listed words. Paperback dictionaries tend to be much smaller, and are also called 'pocket' dictionaries because they, unlike hardcover dictionaries, can go wherever you go. Because of their smallness, paperback dictionaries contain fewer definitions than hardcovers, and are often forced to go without etymologies, or word histories. The OAD is a pocket-sized, paperback dictionary. As such, it has certain limitations as well as strengths. Below I provide what are, in my opinion, the positive and negative aspects of this dictionary, followed by some additional commentary.

Pros:

- Highly portable Although you would need cavernous pockets indeed for the OAD to be a true 'pocket' dictionary, it is compact enough to carry in a suitcase or book bag. The OAD is printed, too, on paper difficult to rip but also lightweight.
- Succinct definitions One advantage of diminutive dictionaries is that in order to help reduce their size, editors reduce the length of their definitions. Brief, pithy definitions of words are easier and quicker to read than the longer definitions found in larger dictionaries.
- Useful usage advice Although a dictionary is no substitute for such guides as Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* and Bernstein's *The Careful Writer*, the OAD is not afraid to let its prescriptive voice be heard. For example, after defining the word 'inflammable' (meaning 'able to be set on fire'), it is stated that the word 'means the same as "flammable"; its opposite is "noninflammable". Careful writers prefer "inflammable".
- Simplified pronunciation scheme Most dictionaries, in showing how a word is pronounced, use symbols called 'diacritical marks'. Understanding them requires a special chart, which, though included in the dictionary, is itself confusing enough for many users to skip reading pronunciations altogether. Although this lax act saves people from temporary mental strain, they're punished in the long run by, for example, being caught pronouncing the word 'nuclear' as if it were spelled 'nucular'. But I digress. The OAD does not use diacritical marks, and instead employs a simplified scheme that is easier to use without an explanatory chart, though one is still provided.
- Eugene Ehrlich is awesome I didn't say this review was unbiased! One of the OAD's editors, Eugene Ehrlich, is the distinguished author of several excellent nonfiction books, including *Amo, Amas, Amat, and More* (a Latin phrasebook) and *The Highly Selective Dictionary for the Extraordinarily Literate* (a delightful sort of dignified rant about dictionary editors who perpetuate what Ehrlich deems poor usage, and much more).

Cons:

- Somewhat outdated The OAD was published in 1980, and to some degree, it shows. Recently coined words, such as 'newbie', 'microsleep', and 'web' in the sense of the World Wide Web, are not present. Don't be misled, however, into thinking that a dictionary absolutely must be up-to-date. If that were true, dictionary-makers would sell fewer dictionaries and software-makers, such as Microsoft, would be far less successful.
- Small, ergo not very comprehensive This is to be expected in a pocket-sized dictionary. If you're going to own a small dictionary, own a large one, too. If possible, go to a real-life, physical bookstore and compare the hardcover dictionaries there. Consider factors such as print size (you'll want the text to be readable without a monocle), page size (you'll want large, but also thick, pages), definitions (do they make sense? are they detailed enough?), and illustrations (do you want quality? quantity? color?).
- Fairly flimsy cover Books are unlike leather in that they don't improve with wear. Paperback books are not also called 'softcovers' for nothing, and the OAD is no exception. After just a year of regular use, my own copy's cover is bent, torn, and scuffed at every edge. The pages, too, are beginning to warp at one corner in the manner of ancient floorboards. Not all paperback books have such ephemeral covers. My 'softcover' edition of Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf* translation is thick, semirigid, and is not going to tear in half any time soon. If only the OAD were printed similarly!
- Paucity of etymologies Large, hardcover dictionaries invariably feature a plenitude of etymologies, or word histories. They're informative, entertaining, and important if you want to better understand a word--and the English language in general. Besides reducing the length of definitions and reducing the number of definitions themselves, editors must pluck out countless etymologies in order to make a compact dictionary. The OAD has undergone this treatment, but fortunately, the few word histories it contains are fascinating ones.
- No illustrations Some dictionaries are ostentatious, overflowing with rich color illustrations; some are utilitarian, with monochrome drawings throughout; and some are irksome, with nothing but words.

Commentary: Again, I recommend that you never use a paperback dictionary (such as the OAD) without a hardcover one in your possession as well. Hardcover dictionaries are satisfyingly comprehensive, but also unwieldy and expensive. That is probably why paperback dictionaries came into being. As you can see from the five stars, I unabashedly recommend that you purchase the Oxford American Dictionary. But one last caveat: avoid the 'reprint', the 'mass market paperback'--the one with a red cover. Buy the one with a yellow cover, which is a bit more expensive, but also larger and printed on higher-quality paper, making it much easier to read. If you're considering buying this dictionary and using it with any frequency, you will not regret it.

Building upon the distinguished tradition of Oxford reference works, including the thirteen-volume "Oxford English Dictionary" --the dictionary of record for all English-speaking people--the "Oxford American Dictionary" was

compiled by expert American editors. It contains all the words an American is likely to hear or read in the home, office, or school and features American spelling, pronunciation, usage, and idioms.