

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Consulting Reference Materials

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.C:

- Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology.

Welcome

Readers can sometimes use context clues to guess or infer the meaning of a word they don't know or understand. However, when inferences fail or more detail is needed, readers can also turn to a reference material for the answers they seek. Reference materials such as dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauruses can help determine the precise meaning of a word. They can also be used to provide further information, such as a word's alternative meanings, part of speech, pronunciation, and etymology.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- Use reference materials.

Exploring the Standard

Reference materials are a great way for readers to increase their vocabulary and to learn more about the words they already use. The most common types of reference materials for determining or clarifying information about words are dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauruses. Each has its own set of characteristics and uses, but the goal of them all is the same: to broaden readers' understanding of words, including their meaning, usage, origin, and connections to one another. Today, dictionaries and thesauruses can be found both in print and online. By learning to use these tools effectively, readers will be able to deepen their reading experience while also learning new words.

Watch!

Watch this video to gain a basic overview of reference materials and their uses:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/how-to-use-reference-sources/38243>

A Closer Look: Choosing a Reference Material

The words in a text have individual meanings that can also affect the overall meaning of a work. If a reader comes across a word he or she doesn't recognize, the word's meaning can sometimes be inferred through context clues. This isn't always the case though, and even educated guesses require confirmation. That is why it's important for readers to take the time to look up the word in a reference material. Still, there are many materials to choose from. How does a reader know which one to use?



Take a look at the following breakdown of the most common reference materials and when to use them:

A **dictionary** is a collection of words in a specific language, often listed alphabetically. Dictionaries provide all of the definitions of a word and often include example sentences demonstrating each usage. They also give the pronunciation, part of speech (noun, verb, etc.), word roots, and etymology, or origin, of a word. General dictionaries contain all the words used by people in everyday life. In contrast, specialized dictionaries contain only terms and concepts related to specific fields, such as medicine, law, or engineering. Both kinds of dictionaries can be found in printed form and online.

A **glossary** is similar to a dictionary, but it appears at the end of a book instead of on its own. It also provides a narrower field of information than a dictionary. Glossaries typically list only one definition for each of the important terms used in a book. This type of reference material often includes words that are either newly introduced, uncommon, specific to a field of study, or otherwise potentially unfamiliar to readers. Glossaries can sometimes be found at the end of fictional novels, plays, and books of poetry, but they are most commonly associated with non-fiction works, such as textbooks or essay collections.

A **thesaurus** lists words that have been grouped together due to their similarity of meaning. Unlike dictionaries, thesauruses do not provide the definitions of words, or if they do, the definitions are kept very brief. Instead, a thesaurus lists the synonyms (words with similar meanings) and antonyms (words with opposite meanings) for each word. For example, the entry for *wobble* lists the synonyms *sway*, *teeter*, *tremble*, and *waver*, as well as the antonyms *steady* and *be still*. The main purpose of a thesaurus is to help readers make distinctions between similar words and to help writers choose precisely the right word for a job. Like dictionaries, thesauruses are available both in print and online.

Read!

For additional information about using dictionaries, take a look the Dictionaries section:

- <http://library.uaf.edu/lis101-reference-services>

Watch!

Watch this video to learn five tips for using a thesaurus:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccMwMA49mRY>

Hint!

In addition to online dictionaries, there are many free dictionary apps available for smart phones, tablets, and other electronic devices. If a smart device is available, try downloading a dictionary to start building vocabulary. That way, when encountering unfamiliar words, one can look them up immediately and get back to the text just as fast.



Teaching Notes: Consulting Reference Materials

The goal of L.9-10.4.C is for students to know to use general and specialized reference materials, both print and online, such as a thesaurus, to find the pronunciation of a word, determine meaning, clarify meaning, etc. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Assign students a list of grade-appropriate words whose meanings they may not know. Ask them to work with a partner or small group. Direct each group to use a thesaurus to identify each word's part of speech. Then ask them to come up with a potential definition for each word based on the synonyms and antonyms they find listed. Once they are finished, have each group explain their findings as part of a class discussion.
2. Assign students a grade-appropriate excerpt from a literary text. Then direct their attention to several examples of unfamiliar words they will not likely recognize. Discuss how contextual clues might allow readers to infer the word's meaning and point out several examples in the text. Then ask students to make their own guesses about the meanings of a few words. Once they are finished, encourage them to look up the unknown words in a dictionary to determine whether or not the meanings they inferred were correct.

Writing Prompts

1. Review with students how different reference materials can be used to complete different tasks. Then assign them a list of scenarios, such as "You are working on an essay about Chinese cuisine, and you notice that you are using the word *delicious* over and over again. Where can you find a synonym for *delicious*?" For an added challenge, include a few scenarios that rely on other common reference materials, such as an atlas or encyclopedia: "Your teacher has assigned each person a country to research. Where would you find information about your assigned country?" Then direct students to write which reference material they would use for each scenario, choosing from the following options:
 - dictionary
 - glossary
 - thesaurus
 - other
2. Ask students to work with a partner. Assign each group a chart that shows a few unfamiliar words and the following categories for each: part of speech, definition, synonym, and example sentence. Leave different categories blank for each word and direct the students to fill in the blanks using a dictionary and a thesaurus. Once they have finished, have the groups exchange charts and compare each other's findings.

