

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* - Questions and Answers

VITAL STATISTICS

2 volumes	3,792 pages
6.190 kg	500,000 definitions
3,500 new words	500 new quotations

Q. WHY IS IT CALLED THE *SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY*?
WHAT IS IT SHORTER THAN?

A. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is a two-volume abridgement of the full 20-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*. The *Shorter OED* contains one third of the content of the full *OED* but is just one tenth of the size. It contains many new words yet to be added to the full *OED*.

Q. HOW CAN IT BE ONE TENTH THE SIZE BUT CONTAIN ONE THIRD OF THE CONTENT?

A. The *OED* gives plentiful quotations for every use, whereas the *Shorter OED* gives fewer, though still includes 83,500 quotations from 7,000 different authors. The *OED* contains some very rare obsolete words that the *Shorter OED* doesn't have, though the *Shorter* does contain rare and obsolete material. The new design is very clear but also economical on space.

Q. WHAT DOES THE *SHORTER OED* COVER?

A. The *Shorter OED* is the most comprehensive dictionary of current English available. It aims to include every word that has been in general use since 1700. It also contains all the words used by Shakespeare and all those in the Authorized Version of the Bible, the poetry of Milton, and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

Q. WHEN WAS THE FIRST EDITION PUBLISHED?

A. Work began on the first edition in 1902 and it was finally published in 1933. This is now the fifth edition of the dictionary.

Q. HOW LONG IS IT SINCE THE LAST EDITION OF THE *SHORTER OED*?

A. The previous edition was published in 1993.

Q. WHY HAS IT BEEN SO LONG?

A. Updating the *Shorter OED* is a massive undertaking. It has taken two years to complete the update.

Q. WHY HAVE YOU DECIDED TO DO A NEW EDITION NOW?

A. Since 1993 and the publication of the previous edition the English language has changed enormously, especially with new technology constantly being developed. For example the last edition didn't contain Internet, CCTV, DVD, or HTML. We felt that the dictionary needed to be brought right up to date, and the addition of 3,500 new entries shows the need for a new edition.

Q. HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHAT TO INCLUDE?

A. We analyse our databases of evidence, hundreds of millions of words of real English compiled from contributions sent in by workers on the Oxford Reading Programme. The decision to include a word is based on evidence of the word's use. The rule of thumb is that we require 5 examples in 5 different printed sources over 5 years, although occasionally a term like *text message* appears and becomes established very quickly and is included.

Q. HAS ANYTHING BEEN TAKEN OUT?

A. No

Q. IS THERE SUCH A THING AS CORRECT ENGLISH?

A. There is something called Standard English, which is the form of English generally considered correct and acceptable. The *Shorter OED* contains non-standard words and expressions, but indicates whether they are for example slang or offensive.

Q. HOW DO I GET A WORD INCLUDED?

As explained above we have to have evidence of a word's use before we can include it.

Q. WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

A. 500 quotations from authors writing in the last ten years have been added, including some from J K Rowling, Helen Fielding, Jonathan Coe, and Quentin Tarantino. Professor Paul Luna has completely redesigned the text, making it clearer and easier to read. Entries for acronyms and abbreviations (AA, CND, CIA, etc) are now treated as full headwords rather than being part of initial-letter entries.

Q. WHAT IS A DICTIONARY WRITTEN ON HISTORICAL PRINCIPLES?

A. The full title of the *Shorter OED* is the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. This means that, as well as being fully up to date in its coverage of current English, it also deals with the development and former uses of words. One of the major differences is that each entry in the *Shorter* shows the date when the word was first recorded, and meanings are arranged chronologically, in the order in which they were first used in English.

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is the most comprehensive dictionary of today's English and its history from 1000 AD to 2002.

For more information or to arrange an interview about the new edition of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* please contact Claire Turner on 01865 267911 or email turnerc@oup.co.uk

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