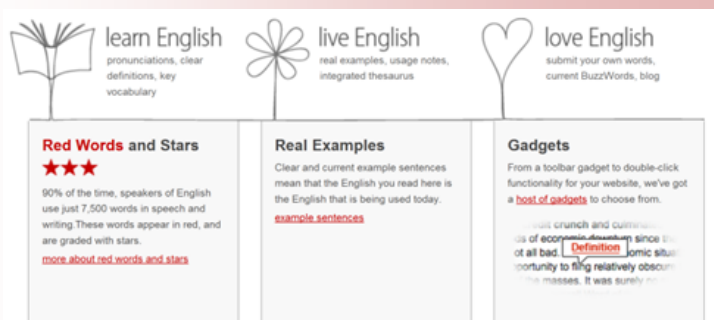


This section highlights some useful learning and teaching websites that can help with planning, teaching and professional development. This time we look at dictionary resources.

## Macmillan Dictionary

<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>



Many institutions use a set dictionary so students are able to learn new vocabulary from the same source. One common choice is Macmillan Learners' Dictionaries.

Macmillan has recently decided to embrace technology fully by halting publication of its paper-based dictionaries and focus instead on digital versions. The online Macmillan Dictionary offers its users

a 'quick search' facility, including a button for pronunciation, and links to a thesaurus. Core words are highlighted in red and come with a star rating to identify their usage frequency. Definitions are clear and include appropriate example sentences.

The Macmillan site also includes a number of games and supplementary exercises. The *Irregular Verb Wheel Game* is a valuable resource which tests learners' knowledge of various verb forms. *Word of the Day* provides students with vocabulary they may not otherwise come across. New words can also be found in *Buzzwords*, which illustrates the usage of these new words in context.

The Dictionary is linked to social media via Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, which does mean that many of the sources are restricted for users in China. A further disadvantage is that the banner ads are distracting. However, the site has many other links which also warrant further investigation, including a blog with commentary on a variety of issues. Overall, the site is not only very useful for learners but also for teachers.

# Oxford Dictionary of Collocations

<http://www.ozdic.com/>

The Oxford Dictionary of Collocations appears online in a similar format to the print edition. Learners can enter a word in the search box and results are returned with a variety of language forms. For example, the word 'situation' returned collocations with adjectives, verbs, prepositions and phrases. Some sample sentences are also provided, which is helpful in clarifying usage.



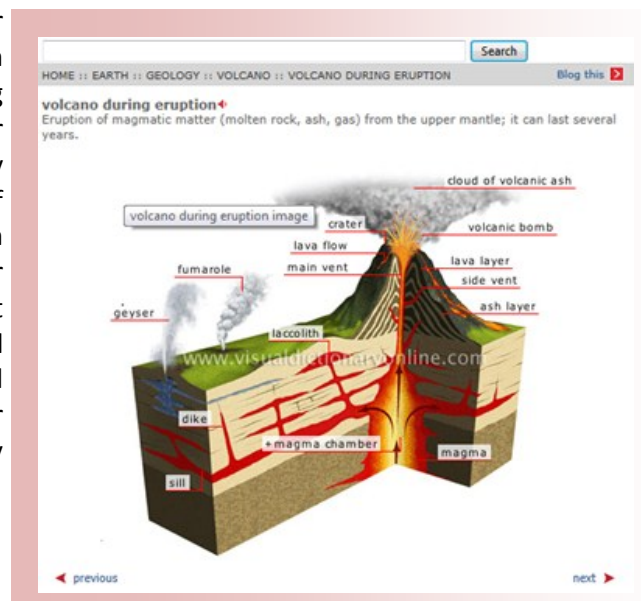
Awareness of collocations is extremely beneficial to all learners of English, although results offered by this site do not necessarily distinguish less academic collocations from more formal language which some users may require. The website also benefits from being devoid of any distracting advertisements, which allows the learner to focus on the task at hand.

# Merriam-Webster Visual Dictionary Online

<http://visual.merriam-webster.com/>

This online dictionary provides detailed definitions of 20,000 terms using more than 6,000 images and covering 15 major themes, including energy, science and architecture. Each image shows an object, a process or a phenomenon with the terms provided for each of its key parts. Users may click on any highlighted term for a written definition, and on a speaker icon to hear the pronunciation. While the themes cover both academic and general topics, the topic areas are limited, so this would be useful more as a supplementary resource rather than as a replacement for the traditional dictionary.

Although not specifically designed for learners of English, the site could be used both in the classroom, particularly for teaching specific subject-area vocabulary, and for students' self-study. The format would clearly be beneficial for visual learners, and the use of images to explain meaning may be helpful in encouraging language students to avoid either learning or recording definitions through direct translation. Additionally, the theme-based organization of the content may be beneficial in encouraging students to take a similar approach to organizing their own vocabulary recording.



# EasyDefine

<http://www.easydefine.com/>



This website has been designed as a time-saving tool for those frustrated with the amount of time spent searching for definitions of individual words. It allows users to paste a list of words into its search facility, whereupon it will provide an instant definition of every word in the list. Definitions are taken from Princeton University's WordNet® lexical database of English. Unfortunately, the definitions have not been designed specifically for language learners, and the definitions of words with several meanings do not appear in order of usage frequency. Therefore, teachers using the site to create material for their students may need to spend time editing the definitions to be more user-friendly for such learners.

Nevertheless, teachers may still find this a considerable time-saver; key benefits being the facility to search not only for definitions but also to look up synonyms, download flashcards or create instant vocabulary building exercises (six different types of exercises are offered, including true or false definitions), all generated from the users' own word lists. Furthermore, such features could be recommended to higher-level students to encourage learner autonomy in self-study, although teachers may wish to suggest supplementing the definitions with resources more catered to language learners, such as an advanced learner's dictionary which provides examples of usage. The site also offers the option of logging in, enabling users to save and organize their word lists according to topics.

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