

## OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY WORK (OED Work)

### Quoting here from the OED website:

1. **The OED is based on a large collection of citations. How were these citations originally gathered and by whom? How are they gathered today?** *The number of people who contributed quotations to the First Edition of the OED runs into four figures. Many individuals contributed thousands of quotations, but sheer volume is not the best measure of significance, as out of all of the quotations sent in, only a selection were included in the published dictionary. The vast majority of people who contributed quotations did so by volunteering to read and excerpt particular works. Readers who offered to do this, many of them in response to the 1879 Appeal, could be supplied with pre-printed slips bearing the bibliographical details of the work, to save them the labour of writing out these details on each slip (an example of this can be seen on the slip submitted by W. C. Minor). Many people also sent in quotations from anything they happened to be reading. From a very early stage lists were issued to the general public of words for which additional quotations were particularly wanted. Of course, a higher proportion of the quotations sent in for words on these lists would be used than was the case for quotations extracted by readers working without knowledge of the editors' specific requirements. The OED still solicits the help of the public in the same way today.* <http://public.oed.com/history-of-the-oed/contributors/>
2. **From what kinds of materials and from what historical periods have the quotations been taken?** *The OED's Reading Programme traces the usage of words through 2.5 million quotations from a wide range of international English language sources, from classic literature and specialist periodicals to film scripts and cookery books. The OED covers words from across the English-speaking world, from North America to South Africa, from Australia and New Zealand to the Caribbean. It aims to collect the word from its earliest entrance into English up to the present time.* <http://public.oed.com/history-of-the-oed/reading-programme/>
3. **In what ways does the OED demonstrate the concepts of descriptive language study?** *The Oxford English Dictionary is not an arbiter of proper usage, despite its widespread reputation to the contrary. The Dictionary is intended to be descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, its content should be viewed as an objective reflection of English language usage, not a subjective collection of usage 'dos' and 'don'ts'. However, it does include information on which usages are, or have been, popularly regarded as 'incorrect'. The Dictionary aims to cover the full spectrum of English language usage, from formal to slang, as it has evolved over time.* <http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/guide-to-the-third-edition-of-the-oed/>

Now, look up some entries in the OED so that you get familiar with how it works. One thing to be aware of is that the OED uses the Latin abbreviation "sb." (substantive) for what most American dictionaries calls a noun.

1. **Anatomy** What was the earliest spelling of this word in English? What misunderstanding caused the word *atomy*? **Anothomia was the earliest spelling. Atomy was caused by compounding the initial syllable with the indefinite article *a* and *an* and therefore the word was divided to "an atomy".**
2. **Ask (v.)** In what centuries was the spelling *axe* used? From what variety of English did the spelling *ask* enter Standard English? **From the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. It came from the northern form.**

3. **Boy** (sb.) From what language does the word enter the English language? Has the word ever had negative meanings? If so, what are they, and when did they appear? **Probably Anglo-Norman or maybe Dutch. At one time the word meant a non-white male, which was considered to be offensive; this appeared in 1578. It was used as early as 1300 to mean a male of no account.**
4. **Cheap** The adjective *cheap* results from the shortening of what phrase? What was the meaning of *cheap* in that phrase? Are cognates of this word common in other Germanic languages? **'Good cheap,' which meant bargain or purchase price. Yes, it has cognates in Old High German and Dutch.**
5. **Gossip** This word was originally a compound of what two words? What was the earliest meaning of the word? In what century did the word first acquire the meaning "idle talk"? **God + sib. 1014: One who has contracted a spiritual affinity by sponsoring a baptism. It became "idle talk" in the nineteenth century.**
6. **Mrs.** What is the origin of the title? In what century did the abbreviation become common? If a woman was called "Mrs.," did that necessarily mean she had a "Mr."? **A contraction of "Mistress"; it was originally used (15thc.) as a courtesy title, and up till the 19<sup>th</sup> century it could be used as a courtesy title for an unmarried lady or girl as well.**
7. **Plow** What is the main entry form of this word in the OED? What is the difference between the two spellings in current English use? **Plough is the main entry form in the OED. It seems like in modern usage, "plough" is the British spelling and 'plow' is the American spelling (thanks to Noah Webster).**
8. **Rooster** What is the source of the word? How is its use limited geographically? In what century was it first used? **The source of the word is the United States. It's limited geographically because it was established in the United States and it was first used in 1772. The British use 'cock' instead.**
9. **Tomato** What is the oldest English form of the word? How is the spelling *tomato* explained? What earlier name did the tomato have? **1604. Its earlier spelling was *tomate*. *Tomato*, however, is an English alteration to Spanish modeled after 'potato'.**
10. **Yankee** What origin of this word do the editors of the OED think is most plausible? Why do they prefer it? The word apparently originated as a derisive term. How early does it seem to have acquired a neutral connotation? **A surname or nickname, possible from Dutch "janke" associations. They prefer it because there are sources to reference these originations. 1784.**