Unlock the Oxford 3000

The words students need to know to succeed in English
Which words should students learn to succeed in English?

Patricia White, Head of Dictionaries and Reference Grammar in the English Language Teaching Division of Oxford University Press explains why students ask this question, and what might be the answer.

Words are a source of endless fascination. Ask a hundred people what their favourite word is, or which words irritate them the most, and you’ll get a hundred different answers and some very strong opinions. Ask them which words they believe a learner needs to know and you’ll soon feel confused and overwhelmed by the diversity of the answers. As language teachers, we are naturally curious about words that we encounter for the first time, and the way words change their meaning. We like finding opportunities to use words and expressions we have recently learned.

But it takes time and effort to learn new words, so it’s not surprising that students ask for guidance. This brochure introduces a resource which, we believe, helps to answer that question.

The resource is the Oxford 3000, a list of the 3000 words that students really need to know in English. Created in collaboration with teachers and language experts, the Oxford 3000 words are included in most of our dictionaries, including the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. The Oxford 3000 is also incorporated into coursebooks such as Q Skills, Aim High and our new course for adult learners, Navigate.

In the following pages you’ll find out exactly what the Oxford 3000 is, how it was researched and compiled, and – most importantly – how it helps learners.
What is the Oxford 3000?

The Oxford 3000 is a list of the 3000 most useful and important words that students need to learn in English.

It includes words that are frequently used in English, and some words that are not so frequent but which are important to know.

The Oxford 3000 words are marked with a key in our learners’ dictionaries, and are available on the www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com website. You can look up the entry for each word, and hear it pronounced in either British or American English.

At elementary level our learners’ dictionaries focus on the Oxford 2000, which includes 2000 of the words on the Oxford 3000 list.

In a recent global survey, 60% of teachers said they would recommend using the Oxford 3000 because it expands vocabulary.

These are the words teachers in a recent global survey used to describe the effect the Oxford 3000 has had on their students:

- focus
- enriched
- interest
- productive
- efficient
- autonomous
- concentrate
- curious
How was the **Oxford 3000** created?

We had three key requirements in creating the **Oxford 3000**:  
1: **sources** – to provide evidence of how the English language is actually used  
2: **criteria** – to use when analysing our sources  
3: **expertise** – to provide insights into the vocabulary needs of learners of English

**Sources**

The **Oxford 3000** is a corpus-based list. A corpus is a database of language from different subject areas and contexts. When lexicographers analyse a particular word in the corpus, the corpus shows all of the occurrences of that word, the contexts in which it is used, and the grammatical patterns of the surrounding words.

The **Oxford 3000** is informed by the:
- British National Corpus (100 million words)
- Oxford Corpus Collection (developed by Oxford University Press and including different types of English – American English, business English etc.)

By using this combination of corpora, we can understand how English is currently used, and which words are used most frequently.

**Criteria**

When deciding which words should be in the **Oxford 3000**, we used three core criteria:
- **frequency** – the words which appear most often in English
- **range** – the words which appear frequently AND across a broad range of contexts
- **familiarity** – words that are not necessarily used very often, but are important in general English

**Expertise**

A group of lexicographers and around 70 English language teachers worked together on the **Oxford 3000**, bringing classroom experience and linguistic expertise together to create a list that truly supports the needs of language learners.

The lexicographers brought their own teaching experience together with many years of experience in dictionary research and development. The teachers came from English language schools all over the world.

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Did you know?

‘When we analysed our corpus, we discovered that we talk about ‘Friday’ and ‘Saturday’ more frequently than ‘Tuesday’ or ‘Wednesday’. But when you learn the days of the week of course you learn all of them at the same time - not just the most frequently used ones, because it’s useful to know them all.’

Joanna Turnbull, Editor of the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 8th edition

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www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/oxford3000
Why use the Oxford 3000?

When our research team looked at the corpora using the criteria explained on page 4, they found that around 3000 words covered 80–85% of vocabulary in a general English text.

Here are the results of our research into frequency and coverage – that is, how much text is covered by the thousand most frequent words, the thousand second-most frequent words, the thousand third-most frequent words and so on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>most frequent word families</th>
<th>coverage</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st 1000</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>2000 = 81.3% coverage (74.1% + 7.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd 1000</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>3000 = 85.2% coverage (81.3% + 3.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd 1000</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>4000 = 87.6% coverage (85.2% + 2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th 1000</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>5000 = 89.4% coverage (87.6% + 1.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th 1000</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12,500 word families</td>
<td></td>
<td>5000 = 89.4% coverage (87.6% + 1.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By learning the first 3000 words, students build a very strong vocabulary which covers a significant majority of the words they will see in texts.

Once they have learned these words and know them well, students can focus their efforts on acquiring more specialist vocabulary that they need to succeed in their chosen area of language study – for example, learning business or academic language for work or further studies.

The Oxford 3000 provides a springboard for expanding vocabulary – see page 9.
Using the *Oxford 3000* with the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* gives students the tools to expand their vocabulary to around 7,500 words, which will allow them to communicate in English at an advanced level.

The *Oxford 3000* words appear in the dictionary as a keyword entry, and are shown with a key symbol.

Many keyword entries include additional information about how the word is used in idioms or phrasal verbs, as well as showing similar or related words.

**Look at the entry for ‘mark’ and answer these questions.**

1. What would an American say instead of the British idiom up to the mark?
2. How many meanings are given for mark as a noun?
3. Which meaning of the verb is being used in this sentence: I had a party to mark my first ten years in the business?
4. Can you find a more specific word for a mark made by ink being dropped on a surface?
5. If you are off the mark, are you close to the correct answer or not?

**Look at the Synonyms note and choose a suitable word meaning ‘mark’ which can fill the gaps in these sentences.**

1. These ____________ will be difficult to remove at low temperatures.
2. There were long dirty ____________ on the window where the birds had made a mess.
3. The children’s faces were covered with ____________ of jam.
4. We could see tiny ____________ of gold on the bottom of the stream.
5. Her essay was covered with ink ____________.

**The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* CD-ROM includes more activities like these.**
How to use the **Oxford 3000**

Create structure with vocabulary learning

The **Oxford 3000** is a ready-made list of words that have been carefully selected to meet the needs of language learners. It’s a list you can trust, and is ideal for class or homework activities.

**Introducing the Oxford 3000 to your students**

“When I started using the **Oxford 3000** with my students three years ago, I wasn’t sure how students would respond to these activities. I found that they seem to like the routine and recognise the value of working with the **Oxford 3000** word list.” – Bjorn Candel

**Focus tool**

The **Oxford 3000** is a perfect tool for focusing students on studying vocabulary.

A huge amount of research and work has gone into compiling this list of vital words for learners of English, and students can take advantage of this by checking if new words they come across in a text or a language activity are on the list.

I give each of my students the **Oxford 3000** in a spreadsheet, with empty columns for definitions, example sentences, word family information, collocations etc.

If a new word is on the list, I tell the students to learn it. If not, they have to decide if they feel that word is important enough to make the effort to learn it.

**Did you know?**

Over 40% of the teachers who use the **Oxford 3000** told us they do so because they like the convenience of having a ready-made list of words.
Beyond the Oxford 3000™

The Oxford 3000™ is used in:

![Oxford Wordpower Dictionary](image1)
![Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary](image2)
![Oxford Student's Dictionary](image3)
![Oxford Advanced American Dictionary](image4)

The Oxford 3000™ is also used in most Oxford learners’ bilingual dictionaries.

The Oxford 2000™ is used in:

![Oxford Essential Dictionary](image5)
![Oxford Basic American Dictionary](image6)

Beyond the Oxford 3000

Our view is that once students have a solid understanding of the key meanings of the Oxford 3000™ and have built a core vocabulary around that list, it is time for them to specialize. They are more likely to make larger gains by learning the vocabulary that suits their specific needs and purposes, which means moving on to specialist wordlists.

Our list acknowledges this. We recognize that, realistically, we can guide their vocabulary only so far. We cannot predict what learners’ specific needs will be.

The Oxford 3000™ provides the most useful, important words to learn first. It offers opportunities to expand vocabulary – and it knows when to stop.

Did you know?

Use the **Oxford 3000 Text Checker** to assess texts you want to use with your students

www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/oxford_3000_profiler

The text in the box (from Patrick White’s introduction on page 2 of this brochure) has a few words highlighted in red. The text has been run through the **Oxford 3000 Text Checker** and the words in red are not in the **Oxford 3000**. All of the other words are included.

Words are a source of **endless fascination**. Ask a hundred people what their favourite word is, or which words irritate them the most, and you’ll get a hundred different answers and some very strong opinions. Ask them which words they believe a learner needs to know and you’ll soon feel confused and overwhelmed by the diversity of the answers.

As language teachers, we are naturally curious about words that we encounter for the first time, and the way words change their meaning. We like finding opportunities to use words and expressions we have recently learned.

This is a useful approach for analysing texts and their vocabulary levels for your teaching activities and the good news is you don’t have to do it manually. We’ve created an extra resource. It’s called the **Oxford 3000 Text Checker** and it’s available free online for you to use.

‘**Oxford 3000 Text Checker** … can prove an invaluable resource in deciding whether a text is well-suited for a particular class.’ *ESLWeb.org*

www.eslweb.org/resources/index.php?topic=2043.0

Find out more about Text Checker at www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/oxford_3000_profiler
As well as having the full list of words and meanings easily accessible on their phones and tablets, students can use the Learn the Oxford 3000 app to test themselves and measure their progress.

3 reasons to recommend Learn the Oxford 3000 to your students:

1. Test yourself on the meaning, usage, spelling and pronunciation of the 3000 most important words to know in English.

2. Practise using the interactive exercises, including multiple choice, drag-and-drop, and text entry.

3. Check what the Oxford 3000 words mean using the mini-dictionary.

See www.oup.com/elt/fingertips

*Available for iPad and iPhone.
The Oxford 3000: the most important words you need to know to succeed in English

The Oxford 3000 wordlist:
- is corpus-based
- has been created by language experts and teachers
- is based on frequency, range and familiarity
- allows students to understand up to 80–85% of words in general English texts
- is used as the defining vocabulary to explain the meaning of words in Oxford learners' dictionaries
- expands vocabulary to 7500 (when using the keyword entries in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)
- can now be learnt with a new app

FREE ONLINE
- Oxford 3000 Text Checker
- Oxford 3000 wordlist, with pronunciation and dictionary look-up

Did you know?
These are just two of our coursebooks that incorporate the Oxford 3000 into vocabulary building. Ask your Oxford representative for more information on other coursebooks that use the Oxford 3000.