

the compact edition of the oxford english dictionary

the compact edition of the oxford english dictionary represents a remarkable achievement in lexicography, offering a condensed yet comprehensive resource derived from the monumental Oxford English Dictionary (OED). This edition provides users with a wealth of information on the English language, including definitions, etymologies, and historical usage, all within a more manageable format compared to the original multi-volume set. As a key reference work, the compact edition balances depth and accessibility, making it suitable for scholars, students, and language enthusiasts alike. This article explores the origins, features, significance, and practical applications of the compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, highlighting its role in preserving the richness of English vocabulary. Additionally, the discussion covers the production techniques and editorial decisions involved in creating this condensed yet authoritative resource. The following sections outline the key aspects of this unique edition, providing a structured overview for a comprehensive understanding.

- History and Development of the Compact Edition
- Features and Content Overview
- Production Techniques and Format
- Importance and Usage in Modern Lexicography
- Comparisons with Other Dictionary Editions

History and Development of the Compact Edition

The compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary was developed as a response to the need for a more accessible and space-efficient version of the extensive OED. The original Oxford English Dictionary, first published in the late 19th century, spanned multiple volumes and contained over 400,000 words and definitions, making it an invaluable but physically cumbersome resource. The compact edition was introduced in the 1970s, utilizing innovative methods to reduce the size of the dictionary while preserving its comprehensive content.

Origins and Motivation

The motivation behind the compact edition stemmed from the desire to provide

a complete dictionary that could fit into a single or double-volume format without sacrificing the depth of information. The original OED's physical bulk limited its use to libraries, institutions, and dedicated scholars. By creating a compact version, the publishers aimed to broaden the dictionary's accessibility to a wider audience, including academics, writers, and general readers interested in the historical and etymological aspects of English words.

Editorial Challenges

Condensing the extensive original dictionary into a smaller format presented significant editorial challenges. Editors had to carefully select which entries to include, determine the level of detail for each definition, and maintain the dictionary's authoritative voice. The process required balancing comprehensiveness with practical constraints, ensuring that the compact edition retained the scholarly rigor associated with the Oxford English Dictionary brand.

Features and Content Overview

The compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary offers a rich array of features that reflect the depth and breadth of the English language. Despite its reduced physical size, the edition includes detailed word entries, comprehensive definitions, and etymological information that trace the historical development of words. This section outlines the key content components and features that characterize the compact edition.

Extensive Word Entries

Each entry in the compact edition provides the word's spelling, pronunciation, part of speech, and multiple definitions where applicable. The dictionary also includes historical quotations illustrating word usage over time, a hallmark of the OED's approach to lexicography. These examples help users understand how meanings have evolved and how words have been employed in various contexts.

Etymology and Historical Development

The compact edition maintains the OED's emphasis on etymology, offering detailed origins of words derived from Old English, Latin, Greek, and other languages. This historical perspective enriches the user's understanding of the English lexicon, highlighting the language's dynamic and multicultural roots.

Additional Linguistic Information

Beyond standard definitions and etymologies, the compact edition includes information on variant spellings, obsolete forms, and usage notes. These elements support nuanced comprehension and reflect the dictionary's role as a scholarly resource.

Production Techniques and Format

The production of the compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary involved innovative techniques designed to condense a vast amount of information into a limited physical space. The resulting format is both practical and sophisticated, enabling users to access the dictionary's extensive content in a compact form.

Micrographic Printing Technology

One of the most distinctive features of the compact edition is its use of micrographic printing. This technique involves photographing the full pages of the original OED and reducing them to a fraction of their size on microfilm or microfiche sheets. Readers use a magnifying viewer to read the text, allowing the entire dictionary to be contained within a few volumes or a single volume with supplementary equipment.

Physical Format and User Experience

The dictionary is typically presented in two volumes accompanied by a magnifier, facilitating readability despite the reduced text size. This unique format minimizes shelf space requirements while preserving the dictionary's exhaustive entries. The compact edition's design caters to users who require comprehensive lexicographical information but have limited space or prefer a portable reference.

Editorial Layout and Typography

In addition to micrographic reproduction, the editorial layout was carefully adapted to maintain clarity and navigability. The typography and organization reflect the original dictionary's structure, including alphabetical arrangement, cross-references, and detailed entry formatting. This attention to detail ensures that the compact edition remains user-friendly and authoritative.

Importance and Usage in Modern Lexicography

The compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary holds significant importance in the field of lexicography and language studies. It serves as a vital resource for researchers, educators, and language professionals who require comprehensive historical and linguistic data in a convenient format.

Scholarly and Educational Applications

Academics and students frequently utilize the compact edition for research into word origins, semantic changes, and the evolution of English vocabulary. Its detailed citations and historical examples support linguistic analysis and enhance the study of English literature and history.

Reference for Writers and Editors

Writers, editors, and language enthusiasts benefit from the compact edition's authoritative definitions and usage notes. It aids in precise word choice, understanding nuances, and maintaining stylistic accuracy in writing and editing tasks.

Preservation of Linguistic Heritage

By condensing the OED without compromising content, the compact edition plays a role in preserving the linguistic heritage of English. It ensures that comprehensive knowledge of the language's development remains accessible despite changing formats and technological advances.

Comparisons with Other Dictionary Editions

The compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary can be contrasted with other versions of the OED and various English dictionaries, highlighting its unique position in the lexicographical landscape.

Original Multi-Volume Oxford English Dictionary

The original OED is vastly larger and more detailed, spanning multiple volumes and containing extensive entries with numerous quotations. However, its physical size and cost limit its accessibility, which the compact edition addresses by offering a condensed alternative with the same authoritative content.

Concise and Shorter Oxford English Dictionaries

Other Oxford dictionaries, such as the Concise or Shorter editions, are abridged versions that omit many historical quotations and detailed etymologies. The compact edition differs by preserving the complete text of the OED, albeit in a reduced physical format through micrographic technology.

Modern Digital Editions

With the advent of digital lexicography, the OED is now available online with advanced search capabilities and regular updates. While digital versions offer convenience and accessibility, the compact edition remains significant as a tangible, scholarly artifact and a testament to innovative publishing techniques.

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary?

The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary is a condensed version of the full Oxford English Dictionary (OED), designed to fit the entire content of the multi-volume OED into a more accessible and portable format, typically using microprint technology.

How does the Compact Edition differ from the full Oxford English Dictionary?

The Compact Edition contains the complete text of the full Oxford English Dictionary but in a much smaller physical format using microprint, allowing it to be published in fewer volumes while preserving all entries and definitions.

When was the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary first published?

The first edition of the Compact Oxford English Dictionary was published in 1971, providing a more convenient alternative to the multi-volume set.

Who edited the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary?

The Compact Edition was edited by John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, who were also involved in the full OED project.

Is the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary still relevant today?

Yes, the Compact Edition remains a valuable resource for comprehensive English language reference, especially for those who prefer a physical book over digital versions, although many now use the online OED for convenience and updates.

What are the physical characteristics of the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary?

The Compact Edition typically consists of two volumes featuring microprinted text, which requires a magnifying glass included with the set to read due to the extremely small font size.

Can the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary be used for academic research?

Yes, it contains the full content of the OED and can be used for in-depth academic research, historical linguistics, and etymology, though digital versions may offer easier search functionality.

Where can one purchase the Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary?

The Compact Edition can be purchased through major bookstores, online retailers like Amazon, or directly from Oxford University Press, though it might be less commonly stocked than digital or standard print editions.

Additional Resources

1. *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*

This is the primary reference work that the compact edition is based on. It condenses the comprehensive Oxford English Dictionary into a more portable

format without sacrificing the depth of word entries and historical usage. It covers contemporary English vocabulary and provides etymologies, pronunciation guides, and examples of usage. Ideal for students, writers, and language enthusiasts who want a reliable dictionary in a convenient size.

2. *A Guide to the Oxford English Dictionary*

This book offers an insightful look into the creation, history, and methodology behind the Oxford English Dictionary. It explains how words are selected, researched, and documented over time, making it a companion for anyone interested in the dictionary's development. The guide also highlights the significance of the OED in the evolution of the English language.

3. *The Making of the Oxford English Dictionary*

A detailed narrative about the monumental task of compiling the OED, this book delves into the lives of the lexicographers and the challenges they faced. It traces the dictionary's origins from the 19th century to its modern editions. Readers gain an appreciation for the scholarly dedication and innovation involved in this linguistic masterpiece.

4. *English Words: History and Structure*

Focusing on the etymology and formation of English vocabulary, this book complements the information found in the compact OED. It explores how English words have evolved, their morphological structures, and their historical roots. A useful resource for those wanting to understand the deeper layers behind dictionary entries.

5. *Oxford English Dictionary: A Bibliography*

This reference work compiles a comprehensive list of publications, articles, and studies related to the Oxford English Dictionary. It serves as a valuable tool for researchers and academics interested in lexicography and the OED's impact on language studies. The bibliography highlights critical analyses and historical accounts.

6. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*

Providing detailed origins and histories of English words, this dictionary pairs well with the compact OED edition. It focuses specifically on the roots and evolution of vocabulary, tracing words back to Old English, Latin, Greek, and other source languages. A must-have for etymology enthusiasts and linguists.

7. *Words and Their Stories: A Companion to the Oxford English Dictionary*

This engaging book presents fascinating anecdotes and histories behind selected English words featured in the OED. It brings the dictionary to life by sharing stories about how certain words entered the language and changed meaning over time. Perfect for readers who enjoy the cultural context of language.

8. *Lexicography: An Introduction to the Oxford English Dictionary*

A scholarly introduction to the principles and practices of compiling dictionaries, this book uses the OED as its prime example. It covers topics such as word selection, citation gathering, and editorial decisions. Ideal

for students of linguistics and aspiring lexicographers.

9. *The Oxford English Dictionary: The First 100 Years*

Celebrating the centenary of the OED, this book chronicles the dictionary's first century, highlighting milestones and key editions. It includes reflections from editors and contributors, showcasing how the dictionary adapted to changing language trends. A fitting tribute to one of the world's most important language reference works.

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