

Newsletter



Seven more Dictionary tips

Go beyond definitions with these tricks for using OS X's humble tool

by [Sharon Zardetto](#), [Macworld.com](#)

Whether you're looking for a word's definition, synonym, or correct spelling, or even for geographical terms and biographical info, Apple's Dictionary can help. Dan Frakes' recent article, [Five Dictionary tricks](#), covered how to use the Dictionary without launching it. But working *inside* this application offers unique advantages.

1. Make the Dictionary talk

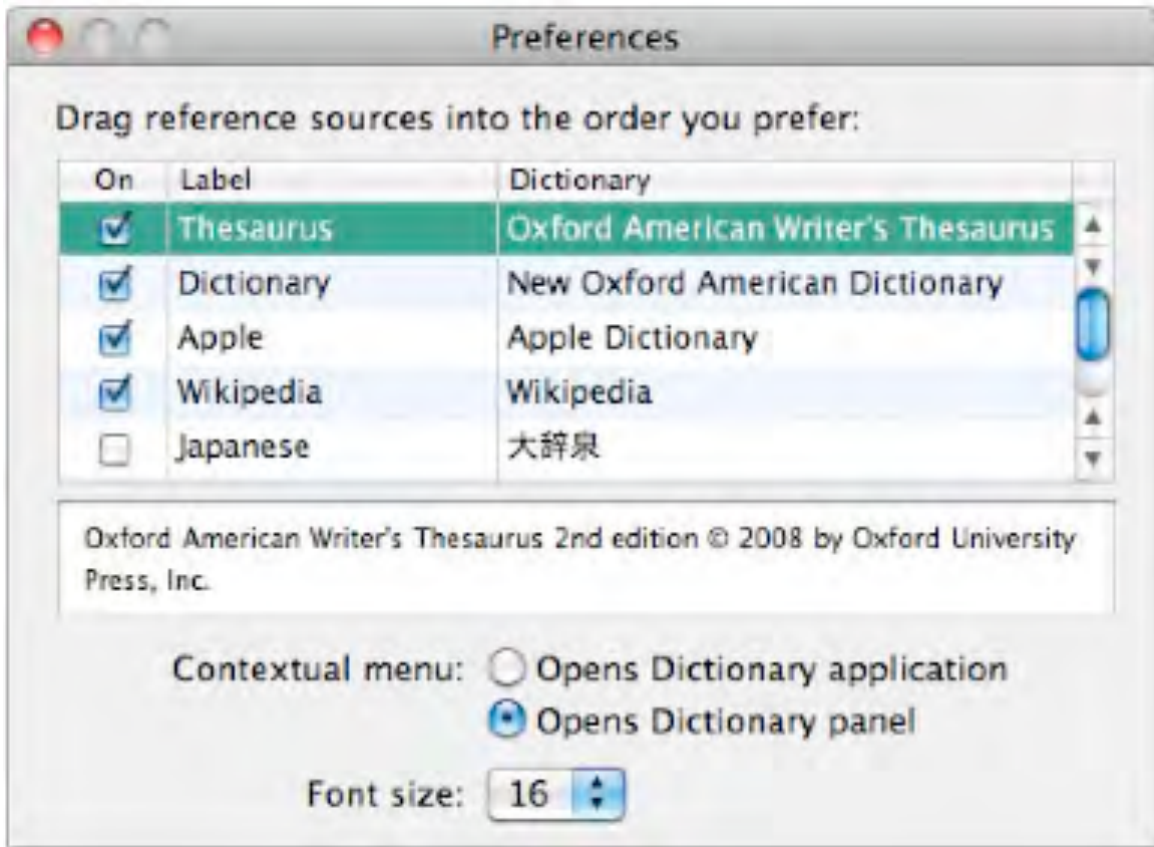
If you can decipher the pronunciations provided by the Dictionary, you are probably a linguist. If you can't, let the Dictionary pronounce the words for you. All the system voices sound slightly robotic, but you can choose the one you like best in the Text To Speech tab under System Preferences -> Speech. The pronunciations are helpful and surprisingly accurate, with correct syllabification and stresses.

To make the Dictionary talk, point to the word and Control-click (or right-click) on it. From the pop-up menu, choose Speech -> Start Speaking. You don't have to select the word first unless it's split into syllables in the entry; if it is, avoid getting only a single syllable pronounced by selecting the word and right-clicking on one of the bullets that separates the syllables.

Bonus tip Skip the selection process for a multi-syllabic word by simply Control-clicking on it elsewhere in the Dictionary window. For example, click on the sample of how it's used in a sentence, or on the title of its Thesaurus entry.

2. Get synonyms instead of definitions

I need synonyms more often than I need definitions, so I want the Thesaurus part of the Dictionary to take precedence both in the Dictionary window and in “quickie” Dictionary access—by typing a word in the Spotlight menu and getting its Dictionary information, or by hovering over a word with your cursor while pressing Command-Control-D in most Apple programs.



Use Dictionary's preferences to choose the reference sources you want shown. Then define their display order by dragging an entry up or down in the list. Use the Contextual Menu buttons to specify what happens when you use the Look Up in Dictionary command after Control- or right-clicking on a word.

Change the Dictionary's priority from definitions to synonyms, and you'll see the Thesaurus entries at the top of the Dictionary window and as the default for Dictionary pop-ups and Spotlight-menu displays. Open the Dictionary (it's in your Applications folder) and choose Dictionary -> Preferences. You'll see a list of references; just drag Thesaurus to the top.

Bonus tip One quick way to access the Dictionary in most applications is to select a word, Control-click, and then choose Look Up In Dictionary in the contextual menu. But if the pop-up Dictionary panel that appears is too small for you, you can choose to always see the full Dictionary window instead. In Dictionary, select Dictionary -> Preferences. Under Contextual Menu, choose Opens Dictionary Application.

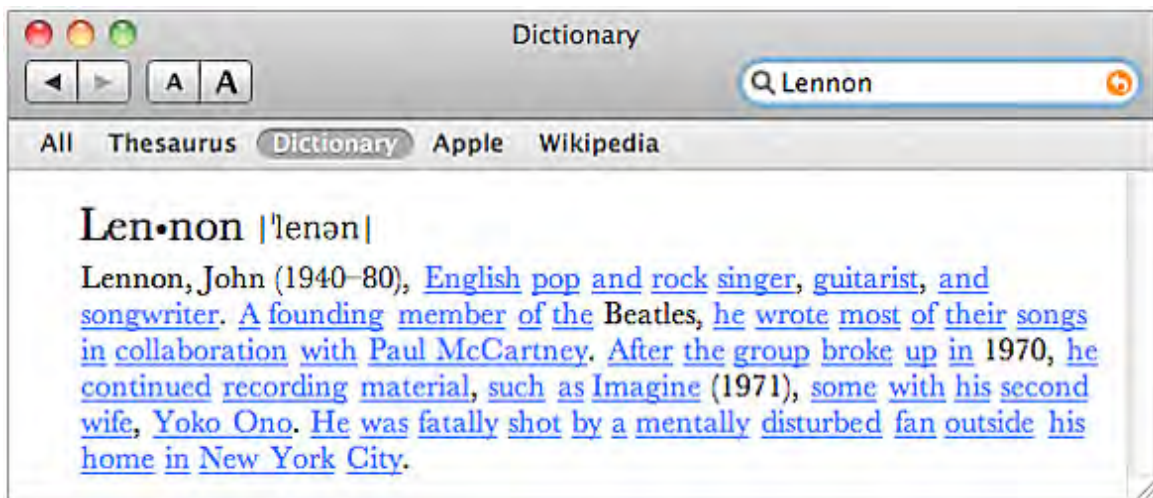
3. Adjust the font size

You have older eyes and need bigger type. Or you have younger eyes and would prefer more text to show in the Dictionary without having to resize its window. Whatever the case, you can accommodate your needs as a default or just temporarily.

Set the default type size using the Font Size pop-up menu in Dictionary's preferences (Dictionary -> Preferences). To adjust the text size temporarily (until you close the Dictionary), use the Increase and Decrease buttons (the large and small A's) or their oddly asymmetrical keyboard equivalents: Command-minus sign (-) for smaller and Command-Shift-equal sign (=) for larger.

4. Use the “hidden” links in the Dictionary window

You wouldn't know just to look at a Dictionary entry, but it's filled with links. Hover over something—almost *anything*—in the window, and you'll see words turn blue and underlined, becoming immediately recognizable as clickable links. That means that if a definition includes an unfamiliar word, you can just click on it to see what it means. Or, follow a trail through lists of synonyms in the Thesaurus to find just the right shade of meaning.



You won't see links in the Dictionary window until you hover over them individually. If they were all permanently displayed, however, this is how a typical entry would look.

5. Look up people and places

Word and phrase definitions aren't the only things in the Dictionary. You'll find biographical information, too. Run across a reference to Ayn Rand and wonder if that was her real name? Want to know what the heck Michelangelo's last name is? You'll find the answers in the Dictionary.

And if geography isn't your strong suit, the Dictionary can come to the rescue not just with expected place names (such as Lake Erie), but also with lesser-known place names (such as [Lake Mobutu Sese Seko](#)).

6. Dive into Wikipedia for in-depth information

You don't have to go to your browser for more information about a briefly defined word or phrase. The Dictionary includes a wormhole to Wikipedia, and displays the current word's entry (as long as you have an Internet connection). You can even click your way through Wikipedia links while remaining in the Dictionary window.

Bonus tip If you have a slow connection and Wikipedia is making your Dictionary display sluggish, turn off the Wikipedia segment. In Dictionary preferences, deselect Wikipedia in the reference list.

7. Censor the Dictionary

If you have children using a Mac and don't want certain words to show in the Dictionary, you can prevent them from being displayed (assuming the child is using a separate, non-administrative account). Log out of the child's account, and in the Accounts preference pane, click the Lock icon so you can make changes. Select the child's account in the list and click the Open Parental Controls button. In the Content tab, select Hide Profanity In Dictionary. Poof! Vulgar terms disappear (think George Carlin's seven dirty words), while still leaving access to such things as real names for body parts.

Sharon Zardetto is currently deriving much pleasure from two new additions to her family: the latest MacBook Pro and an iPad. She writes about the latter in [iPadPunditry](#).

Software Updates

iTunes – 9.1.1 (12) **NOTE:** Fixes changes in the Modification Date field

NeoOffice – 3.0.2 patch 4

Apple QuickTime – 7.6.6

NeoOffice – 3.1.1

iPad Numbers – 1.1

iPad Keynote – 1.1

iPad Pages – 1.1

Java for Mac OS X 10.6 – Update 2

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