

# Research Skills for Middle School

## Dictionary Skills

What do the letters ZIP in ZIP code stand for?

What does it mean to be obstreperous?

Is the correct spelling harangue or harange?

Where might you find the answers to these questions, besides Google®?

A dictionary! Dictionaries are full of interesting, amazing, and helpful information. When you are doing research, a dictionary is most helpful in finding the meaning of a word, the use of a word is used, and the spelling of a word.

Let's begin with a refresher about dictionaries. All dictionaries, whether in English or a foreign language, have the same basic format. A very important key to dictionary use is looking at the guide words. Do you remember what guide words are? Guide words are words in the dictionary used to locate other words alphabetically. Look in the dictionary and note the guide words at the top of each page.

Now that we remember the purpose of guide words, let's use them to complete Challenge Worksheet 1. If that seemed a bit easy, try Challenge Worksheet 2. (Note: Download Challenge Worksheets from the course lessons page to complete these worksheets.)

The dictionary can also be used to assist you in knowing how a word is used. Take, for example, the word "sit" Looking in your dictionary, you will notice "sit" has many different meanings and uses. In all dictionaries, after the word, you can find the pronunciation and the type of word. Looking again at "sit," you can see it is most often a verb but can also be used as a noun. Other times, you may be looking to use a word that is a homophone. Homophones are words that sound alike but have different meanings. On your own, list some words that sound alike, then look them up in the dictionary and write down their meanings. Or complete Challenge Worksheet 3. (Note: Challenge Worksheet 3 is found in the Challenge Worksheets download with the other Challenge Worksheets.)

While your first thought may be to ask a parent or use spell check when it comes to spelling an unfamiliar, there are times when those are not options. Remember those cool things called guide words? Those are your secret key to looking up a word for proper spelling. Not sure you found the correct word? Read the definition! Let's try with a few intentionally misspelled words: hipocorism (using pet names, baby talk between grownups), codswelllup (nonsense, drivel), and gargantuan (gigantic).

As you can see, the dictionary is an essential tool when researching and writing. Whether finding the meaning of a word you have read, learning how to use a word, or mastering the spelling of a word, the dictionary is your one-stop shop!

## Library Skills, Part One



A library can be defined as an organized collection of informational resources on various areas of interest. But in actuality, it is a world of knowledge and adventure for one who discovers the thrill of properly using it. You can travel to distant places or walk in the footsteps of a famous person by just choosing the right book. You can peek into a world that is not normally seen by reading about microorganisms, and you can roam the Amazon rainforest by reading a book about it even though you may not physically set your foot there. A library has the power to kindle the spark of excitement in learning and whisk you to heights unreached as you achieve success in life. It could ignite the love of travel, which you may realize by traveling all around the world when you grow up. A library is a place of fun and joy.

To enjoy all the benefits a library has to offer, one needs to know what to look for in the library. The first thing one might notice is the books. Yes, there are a lot of them. But that is not it. We also find magazines, journals, and newspapers. For those who love to listen, a library also has audio resources like audio books, cassette tapes, and CDs. Libraries also have video resources in CDs, DVDs, films, and Blu-ray Discs™. In recent days, libraries also have access to an enormous amount of digital resources. Libraries also have microfilms to store information from older publications.

All the resources mentioned may not be found in every library, as the type of library is as varied as the resources in the library. You may have your own library on a small book shelf with all your favorite books. It is a private library. You might visit a public library which might have all the resources mentioned earlier. There are also educational institutions that have academic libraries for the use of the students. In some work places, libraries are used to provide informational resources to the workers. Scientists love to use research libraries to learn about advancements in their field of research. There are also some special libraries that serve the needs of a specific group of people, like a library for homeschoolers.

In spite of all the different types of libraries, the etiquette while using the library stays the same. Always replace the book in the same location from which it was taken so that it can be retrieved easily for later use. Maintain silence when using the library because there might be others who are using the library. Return the books within the specified time, as others may want to use the book. Handle the books with care so many more people can enjoy them, too. Follow the check-out and check-in procedures of your library.