

## **T.O.O.L.S. for Work Supplement 5**

### **Dictionary Use**

**Materials:** If possible, several dictionaries written for various skill levels, depending upon the literacy levels of your participants. (See bibliography for suggestions.)

**Prerequisite:** Completion of Session 1 and helpful, but not necessary, Supplements on Nouns, Verbs and Adjectives

**Lesson Duration:** 1-2 hours

#### **I. Introduction**

A. Many participants have had very little or no experience using a dictionary. Many will tell you they feel overwhelmed when trying to use one. The objective of this supplement is to teach basic use skills, develop confidence, and have a lot of fun, especially exploring the dictionary, so participants will be encouraged to use this tool outside of class.

B. Explain that some books, called reference books, have so much information that nobody is expected to remember it all. The important thing is to know how to look things up in reference books.

C. Ask if anyone knows what a dictionary is. Point out that a dictionary has a lot of information about words, and also about other things.

#### **II. Table of Contents**

A. Use your class dictionaries so that each participant can take a turn.

B. Ask participants to find the table of contents and in it, the following:

1. Guide to using the dictionary
2. Pronunciation
3. Parts of Speech

C. In the Table of Contents, ask participants to find other interesting information in the dictionary. Answer any vocabulary questions. For example, a Table of Weights and Measures, lists of Colleges and Universities, Punctuation, and so on. Explore the possibilities in the various dictionaries you have in the classroom.

#### **III. Finding a word in the dictionary**

A. Alphabetical order

1. Look at some dictionary pages together, noting that the words are listed in alphabetical order.

2. Practice looking for some words, using alphabetizing skills.

B. Guide words

1. Explain the use of guide words. Pointing them out at the top of each page.

2. Ask if anyone can find the instructions for using guide words by using the table of contents or another clue. If they can, ask them to explain to the group how they found the instructions. If they cannot, walk them slowly through the process.

3. Demonstrate how guide words work, looking up example words in the dictionary or words participants give you to look up.

4. Lead participants in a lot of practice finding certain words. Use words from their vocabulary lists, or invite them to suggest other words they are interested in.

#### **IV. Using the basic information shown for a word**

A. Syllabification

1. Explain that English words are made with one or more uninterrupted sounds, and give examples, writing on the board.
  2. Ask the class to identify the syllables in words you give them and write on them board.
  3. Show participants how each word in the dictionary is already split into syllables.
- Explain how this can help them pronounce the word. Look at several examples together.

#### B. Pronunciation symbols and key

1. Explain that the next entry next to any word in the dictionary will show how to say the word.
2. Explain that the pronunciation key is a group of symbols that tell you how to say the word. Ask if anyone can find the key by using the dictionary's table of contents or other clues. If they can, ask them to tell the group how they figured it out. If they cannot, walk the participants through the process of locating the key.
3. Demonstrate with a few words how to use the key.
4. Ask participants to practice using the key to pronounce some words you see on the dictionary's page.
5. Let them practice using the words from one of their vocabulary lists. Allow for a lot of practice, until you are sure they understand the concept.

#### C. Parts of speech

1. Explain that the next entry shows whether the word is a noun, verb, adjective, etc. Explain that the entry is normally shown as an abbreviation of "noun", "verb", "n." or "v.", and so on.
2. Look at several words in the dictionary together and identify their part of speech: noun? verb? adjective?
3. Look up several words from a vocabulary list and identify their part of speech: identifying their use: noun? verb? adjective?

#### D. Definition

1. Explain that the definition is the meaning of the word.
2. Explain that some words can have more than one meaning. When this happens, all the meanings will be shown for the word. Find some examples to show.
3. Explain that some dictionaries show only basic information, and some show more. Explain that the order of different definitions can be different from dictionary to dictionary.
4. Ask if anyone can find the way to use the definition section by using their table of contents or other clue. If they can, ask them to tell the group how they found it. If they cannot, walk the participants through the process of finding it.
5. Read through the definition use section together. Apply it to some words you find together.

### V. Practice

A. As a group, use the dictionary to practice finding, pronouncing, and defining words from a vocabulary list until you think participants feel comfortable with the process.

#### B. The value of a dictionary

1. Ask the participants how they feel now that they have some familiarity with the dictionary. Ask them how this might make a difference to them.
2. Point out that there are many different kinds of dictionaries, written for all skill levels, and a librarian or bookstore can show you a version that will be right for you.
3. Point out that many dictionaries come in paperback, if money is an issue.
4. Ask the participants with children how important they think it might be for their kids to learn how to use a dictionary. Examples might be:
  - Bigger vocabulary
  - Better grammar
  - Better grades in school

- Better learning skills
5. Ask for ways to promote the use of dictionaries in their children. Examples might be:
- Having a dictionary in the house.
  - Seeing mom or dad use one
  - Using the dictionary in the library
  - Give not only the definition of a word to a child, but also show them how to look it up in the dictionary

## **VI. Advanced dictionary use**

A. Use this this section only if there is adequate time and interest of instructor and participants. Point out that many dictionaries offer even more information about words than you have discussed so far.

1. Word beginnings (prefixes). Explain that many dictionaries show these as though they were complete words and it can be useful to look them up. Demonstrate this with common prefixes such as "pre", "ex", "un" and so on. Ask participants if they have examples they would like to look up.

2. Word endings (suffixes). Explain that many dictionaries show these as though they were complete words and it can be useful to look them up. Demonstrate this with common suffixes such as "tion" or "ate". Ask the participants if they have examples they would like to look up.

3. Other words with the same or opposite meaning (synonyms and antonyms). Explain that many dictionaries show other words that mean the same, as well as words that are the opposite. Have participants see if the dictionary you are using does this. Look up several words to get a feel for the way this works.

4. Word history: Explain that some words come from other languages, and/or have been in use for a long time. Their spelling and meaning can change. Some dictionaries show this. If possible, demonstrate this with a dictionary in class.

### **B. Bibliography**

1. Webster's New World Children's Dictionary, designed for children, ages 8 - 11
2. MacMillan Dictionary for Children, designed for middle school use (grades 4 - 8) but could be useful for low level adult
3. Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Basic English, most commonly used English words, easy, available in paperback, a good place for an adult learner to start