

Student's Review

A review of *Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English*

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As a French native speaker studying English (Linguistics, Phonetics, History, Literature and Translation), I am required to use dictionaries. Nowadays, online dictionaries and translators are so ubiquitous that people might think having book dictionaries is useless... I disagree. Personally, I own three book dictionaries: one bilingual (*Robert et Collins Senior*); and two monolingual (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)*, 7th Edition and *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary*), and I use them as much as I use online dictionaries. Translators can be helpful if you know how to use them (i.e. if don't rely on them to give you a correct sentence but to give you an idea of a translation that you will then reformulate), but they don't give any explanation, or context, examples, collocations... Online dictionaries are helpful, and perhaps they can and/or will replace book dictionaries in the future (e.g. the *Oxford English Dictionary* which is not printed anymore) but from my experience (comparing websites and books), there is most of the time less information on websites than in books (less examples, shorter definitions...), which is why I keep using my books.

As an English learner, I was asked to write a review on the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English (OLDAE)*. As the name suggests, it is not a classic dictionary of English, like the two I already own, but a dictionary of Academic English. It includes words of the Academic Word List, but also, more generally, any word that might be useful for academic studies. Therefore, it is a dictionary of words likely to be used in essays, or other academic works, that we, university students, are required to write. So it only contains 22,000 words, compared with 183,500 for the *OALD*. It also has an "Academic Writing Tutor" section in the end, which gives advice on how to write different types of academic works. I will start by talking about its appearance, and then I will talk about its content and compare it to other dictionaries.

Some facts: this dictionary has about 1,000 pages, for a width of about 4 cm (compared with c. 5 cm for the *OALD*, and 4.5 cm for the *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary (CACD)*). So it is a compact dictionary, but if we consider its size compared to its number of words, compared with the *OALD*, it is much bigger. The reason for that is that its pages are much thicker (and therefore less fragile). It has a weight of c. 1.18 kg (compared with c. 1.3 kg for the *CACD*, c. 1.5 kg for the *OALD* and 2.5 kg for *Collins*), which makes it the lightest of the dictionaries I have handled. So this is a nice compromise between quality and volume, and it is compact enough to be carried in your schoolbag!

The entries are presented like this:

“**get** /get/ *verb* (**getting**, **got**, **got** /gɒt; *NAmE* ɡɑ:t/) **HELP** In spoken American English, the past participle **gotten** /'ɡɑ:tn/ is almost always used. **HELP** **Get** is one of the most common words in English, but people often try to avoid it in formal writing and use alternative words such as **obtain** or **receive**. **1** [T, no passive] ~ **sth** to obtain sth: *When we repeated the procedure, we got the same results. [...]*” (p.359)

There are several examples for each grammar structure. However, it is clear and we can easily find what we are looking for among long entries thanks to the bold grammar structures that stand out. For each entry we are offered definitions, but also idioms, word grammar information such as irregular forms of verbs or plurals, dependant prepositions, comparatives and superlatives of adjectives, collocations, synonyms and opposites, where applicable.

There are also “help” notes which gives information about usage, and “see also” notes which refers to words with similar or related meaning. It gives derivatives of the word when there are some (for example, for the entry “geographical”, the words “geographic” and “geographically” are also indicated) (p.358). Words in the Academic Word List are distinguished by a small AWL icon. Some of them also have a box with the word family.

Finally, there are four other boxes used in this dictionary: “Which word?” which explains differences between often-confused words, “Grammar point”, “Thesaurus” and “Language bank” which helps students find different and more academic ways of saying something.

The “Academic Writing Tutor” section is very well-presented as well. It gives very clear methods, step by step, on how to write different academic works (one method for each type of academic works), and also includes useful chunks that we could use in our own work. It gives advice on how to well analyse a question, in order to answer it in the most efficient way, and on how to use and reference sources – always presenting different pieces of work with comments on them to show what to do and what to avoid.

Compared to the *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*, I would say that the *Oxford Learners’ Dictionary of Academic English* might contain less information about the words’ idiomatic expressions and grammar. For example, the entry for *get* in the *CACD* is four pages long, and contains 14 different meanings of *get*, with several definitions and examples for each, 40 idioms and 41 phrasal verbs, whereas in the *OLDAE*, the idioms are indicated ‘at the entries for the nouns and adjectives in the idioms’ (p.359), and there are only about 20 phrasal verbs indicated, but the essential information is there.

To conclude I would say that the *Oxford Learners’ Dictionary of Academic English* has the advantage of being conveniently small and light for a dictionary, which is a very important quality for me, as it makes it easy to carry. The information is presented in a clear way, and it does not overwhelm you with too many details that might confuse you, but gives you the most important, the essential information, that you would need for writing an academic work. And finally, the ‘Academic Writing Tutor’ section is a real treasure, especially for students who might not know how to well organize their work, the different steps to follow before, during and after writing it.

So I would recommend this dictionary to any student, and especially to those who do not usually like dictionaries because they are too big and contain too much unnecessary information, as this one does not, and will be very helpful when writing essays. I will definitely use it for my next assignments!

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