Marks, Spaces and Boundaries

PUNCTUATION (AND OTHER EFFECTS) IN THE TYPOGRAPHY OF DICTIONARIES

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ABSTRACT

Dictionary compilers and designers use punctuation to structure and clarify entries and to encode information. Dictionaries with a relatively simple structure can have simple typography and simple punctuation; as dictionaries grew more complex, and encountered the space constraints of the printed page, complex encoding systems were developed, using punctuation and symbols. Two recent trends have emerged in dictionary design: to eliminate punctuation, and sometimes to use a larger number of fonts, so that the boundaries between elements are indicated by font change, not punctuation.
We think of the simplification of typographic presentation as a recent development, and this certainly applies to reducing the amount of punctuation in a text: road signs contain no punctuation, and normally only one size of lettering; the title-piece of the *Wall Street Journal* with its closing period is a quaint nod to a vanished past of metal type and fussy Victorian title-pages; salutations and initials have lost their stops. We are now used to the numerals in lists and newspaper headlines not being followed by full-stops. We expect dashes in text to be regularized to en- or em-rules, and not to have the rhetorical variation in length that we see in eighteenth-century fiction. So to learn that this dictionary entry, with simple un-stopped numerals and lower-case definitions, dates from the eighteenth century may come as something of a surprise.

**Figure 1:** Benjamin Martin, *Lingua Britannica Reformata*, 1749

And it is something unusual for its period. Here is a more normally capitalized and punctuated edition of another text of the same period (a condensed edition of Johnson’s *Dictionary*).

**Figure 2:** Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary*, octavo edition, 1760
Or more complex still.

To CARRY, v. a. [charier, Fr. from currus, Lat.] 1. To convey from a place; opposed to bring, or convey to a place: often with a particle, signifying departure; as, away, off. 2. To transport. 3. To bear; to have about one. 4. To take; to have with one. 5. To convey by force. 6. To effect any thing. 7. To gain in competition. 8. To gain after refusal. 9. To gain; with it; that is, to prevail. [le porter, Fr.] 10. To bear out; to face through; with it. 11. To continue external appearance. 12. To manage; to transact. 13. To behave; to conduct; with the reciprocal pronoun. Sometimes with it; as, he carries it high. 15. To urge; to bear forward with some kind of external impulse. 17. To bear; to have; to obtain. 18. To exhibit to show; to display on the outside; to set to view. 19. To imply; to import. 20. To contain; to comprise. 21. To have annexed; to have any thing joined: with the particle with. 22. To convey or bear any thing united or adhering, by communication of motion. 23. To move or continue any thing in a certain direction. 24. To push on ideas, arguments, or any thing sucesive in a train. 25. To receive; to endure: not in use. 26. To convey by means of something supporting. 27. To bear; as trees. 28. To fetch and bring, as dogs. 29. To carry off. To kill. 30. To carry on. To promote; to help forward. 31. To carry on. To continue; to put forward from one stage to another. 32. To carry on. To prosecute; not to let cease. 33. To carry through. To support; to keep from failing, or being conquered. (1.) When he dieth, he shall carry no hing away.

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial. Acts, viii. 2. I mean to carry her away this evening, by the help of these two soldiers. Dryden's Spanish Fryar.

As in a hive's vinnamon dome,
Ten thousand bees enjoy their home;
Each does her florid action vary,
To go and come, to fetch and carry.

They exposed their goods with the price marked, then retired; the merchants came, left the price which they would give upon the goods, and retired; the Seres returning carried off either their goods or money, as they liked best. Arbuthnot.

(2.) They began to carry about in beds those that were sick. Mark, vi. 55.

Figure 3: Samuel Johnson, Dictionary, quarto edition, 1777

And if we are expecting punctuation, indeed dictionary presentation as a whole, to get simpler and more open over the centuries, we may be disappointed when we arrive at the early twentieth century, and find an example like this (figure 4).

Note how much typographic coding is applied to an entry such as Puseyism. Almost every word is in a different font (some in more than one), abbreviations are freely used and parts of the entry are bracketed. A plus sign is used. And Figure 5 is an example of almost impenetrable typographic coding from the 1970s.

So what are dictionary compilers and printers trying to do with punctuation—indeed with typography generally? Does complex information have to be presented with a complex typography? And is that complexity always the same as obscurity? Have dictionaries been getting more complex?
Figure 4: Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1st edition, 1911

game a. Like a gamecock, spirited (or as; as ~ as Ned Kelly, (Austral. colloq.) very brave); having the spirit or energy to do; ready for. [f. GAME in obs. sense "fighting spirit"]
game b. v.t. & t. Play at games of chance for...
Punctuation marks indicate the boundaries in text, and in continuous prose may be the only guide to the reader of the text's structure, dividing sentences into clauses and indicating the rhetorical value of a string of words. Complex typography can indicate structural boundaries in additional or alternative ways, even if the text has to be presented in a linear fashion, and conventional punctuation marks can to some extent be eliminated if the reader can infer how to read from the typographic presentation. In displayed typography, where there is relatively little constraint on the space that can be occupied, vertical space—between heading and text, between different kinds of paragraph—is the most effective form of typographic articulation, partly because it can be carefully graded—so we can tell the difference between the larger space above a heading and the smaller space below, and understand the heading's closer connection with the material that follows. Where space is limited, the paragraph indent allows for segmentation of a column of text without the need for additional vertical space between paragraphs. The standard paragraph indent has come to be the minimum indication necessary of a break in the text's structure in print, one that we can recognize but glide over with ease, one that does not disrupt the reader's sense of the continuity of the text.

In a continuous printed text it is less easy for the reader to infer continuity when paragraphs are set full out and divided by vertical space. The spaced, full-out paragraphs favored by some designers in the mid-twentieth century for books can work in specific contexts where space is not at a premium, and where it is important for the reader to understand clearly the paragraph structure of the text—web pages are a good example of this—but in print such spaces often imply too much fragmentation of a text for continuous reading. They emphasize the unit of the paragraph at the expense of the whole. The indented paragraph minimizes the individual paragraph's status relative to the whole text; vertical space (or a hanging indent) emphasizes the paragraph's separateness. And the hanging indent has greater power to indicate a significant division because of the potential emphasis it places on the first word.

Dictionary entries have experimented with a variety of devices to indicate the whole text's division into entries, and the division of those entries into their constituent parts—headwords, grammatical information, etymology, pronunciation, senses, definitions, examples and notes. As dictionaries have grown in complexity, the need for easy access to component parts of an entry has grown, and the solution to this has been found in the careful mapping of distinctive typography to constituent elements.
Not surprisingly, dictionaries with relatively simple structures can be accommodated by relatively simple typography. The earliest dictionaries were glossaries, essentially simple lists. The conventional use of roman and black letter could be used to separate the Latin (roman) and vernacular (black letter) visually with absolute certainty, removing the need for punctuation (the example is Coote's *English Schoole-maister*, 1596).

The work of Robert Estienne (1503–59), who was both a lexicographer and a printer, can be seen as a turning point in using typography effectively to allow complexity in dictionaries.
The clarity of Estienne's entries is achieved by the use of three sizes of type, and his contrast of roman and italic fonts (here, roman for Latin and italic for French), but punctuation plays its part, with the paragraph mark being used to indicate the main sense divisions. When a printer has to make his entries more compact, as in Calepino's multilingual dictionary where the entire entry is set as a single paragraph, the boldness of the paragraph mark becomes an even clearer organizing principle in the entry.

Because we can easily discriminate different tonal values within a block of text, bold marks and bold letters are the most effective way of picking out a section or a word for our attention; they act as a form of visual punctuation. We might even perceive italic as a variant (as in the examples above) because we perceive the tonal and rhythmic disruption of the text rather than because we perceive the type as sloped.
A-bān'don, n. 1. The act of abandoning or deserting; relinquishment. [Obs.] 2. One who abandons, or who is abandoned; one forsaken. [Obs.]

A-bān-don' (a-ban-don'), n. [Fr. See supra.] A complete giving up; hence, an utter disregard of self, arising from absorption in some favorite object or emotion, and sometimes a disregard of appearances, producing either careless negligence or unstudied ease of manner.

A-bān'doned, p. a. Given up, as to a vice; hence, extremely wicked, or sinning without restraint; irreligiously wicked; as, an abandoned youth; an abandoned villain.

Syn.—Forsaken; deserted; desolate; abject; forlorn; profligate; corrupt; vicious; depraved; reprobate; wicked; heinous; criminal; vile; odious; detestable. — AbANDONED, PROFLIGATE, REPROBATE. These adjectives agree in expressing the idea of great personal depravity. Profligate has reference to open and shameless immoralities, either in private life or political conduct; as, a profligate court, a profligate ministry.

You are so witty, profligate, and thin, At once we think thee Milton’s Death and Sin.

Epigram on Voltaire.

Figure 9: Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language, 1886

Up to the nineteenth century only roman, italic and small-capital fonts were available to printers; the only bolder letterforms were black-letter, which had a distinct rhetorical meaning: that the text was in the vernacular, in English, not in Latin or another of the international languages of learning. The English Schoolemaister is a book of hard words, that is it introduces the reader to an aspirational vocabulary of Latinate and French forms: Latinate ‘active’ for the Anglo-Saxon ‘nimble,’ French ‘affianced’ for ‘betrothed.’ Black-letter could therefore be useful for headwords and other emphasis, but only where its use coincided with its association with the vernacular; headwords are shown in black-letter as late as Kersey’s 1706 edition of Phillip’s World of Words. In Francis Junius’s etymological dictionary (published 1743) the different Germanic languages are set in different black-letter fonts to identify them, and the visibility they achieve through their boldness is accidental. Black-letter was replaced by headwords in capitals or a combination of capitals and small capitals. The introduction of bold styles of type in the nineteenth century allowed clear articulation of entries on the page, and headwords achieved a new prominence. Bold type (shown above in an 1886 edition of Webster’s) would become the main visual punctuation of the page for the reader, and the main signal of the start of a new entry.
The structure of a dictionary entry is essentially a list with nested sub-lists, and this is clearly revealed in the presentation of Johnson’s Dictionary. Each entry consists of a headword section (including grammatical and etymological information), then one or more definitions, each followed by one or more illustrative quotations (Figure 10).

The text of Johnson’s dictionary was relatively unmarked, as paragraphing, indenting and alignment did the work of articulating the structure of an entry. Robert Hunter (Encyclopaedic Dictionary, 1879) and James Murray (Oxford English Dictionary, 1884–) (see figures 11, 15 and 16) added a range of typographic cues for various elements, but these were large format dictionaries, and were able to retain spatial organizing features.

Figure 10: Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language, 1755

Figure 11: The Oxford English Dictionary, 1884–1933
The need to save space in printed dictionaries means that the linear separation of elements below the level of the entry is not always observed; in compact dictionaries senses and illustrative quotations are generally run on. Compact dictionaries began to appear at the end of the nineteenth century with the publication of Chambers’s *Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1901), and titles such as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1911) came to dominate the popular market. They contained huge amounts of information, but the need to compress this volume of material, and the decision to make every entry, however complex its structure, into a single paragraph compromised accessibility. These run-on dictionaries removed the overall visual structuring that had oriented the reader within the entry, and meant that the reader had to rely on decoding the increasingly complex coding of typography and punctuation in which they were set. The need to rely on typographic coding rather than spatial organization was compounded by the introduction of mechanical typesetting, which placed a limit on the number of different fonts that could be set at any one time. The example in Figure 12 is from the COD 6th edition (1976).

With space no longer an option, modern compact dictionaries would have to rely on typographic cues—font changes and graphic marks—to do this articulation.

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*~ point*, state of game when one side needs only one more point to win it; *~preserver*, landowner etc. who breeds game and applies game laws strictly; *~tenant*, lessee of shooting or fishing; *~(s) theory*, mathematical analysis of conflicts in war, economics, games of skill, etc.; *~warden*, person locally supervising game and hunting. [OE *gamen*, = OS, OHG, ON *gamen*]  
*game* a. Like a gamecock, spirited (past game; as *~ as Ned Kelly*, (Austral. colloq.) very brave); having the spirit or energy to do; valiantly ready for; hence *~-ly* (-ill) adj., *~-ness* (-mn-) n. [f. *GAME* in obs. sense ‘fighting spirit’]  
*game* v.i. Play at games of chance for money, gamble; *gaming-house*, -table, (frequented for gambling); hence *~-ster* (-m-) n. [ME, f. *GAME*]  
*game* a. (Of leg, arm, etc.) lame, crippled. [18th c. dial., of unkn. orig.]  
*gāmelan* n. E. Ind. orchestra, mainly of percussion instruments; kind of xylophone used in this. [Jav.]  
*gāmes* /men/ (-mzm-) n. (pl. *~-men*). Exponent of gamesmanship; hence *~-manship* n., art or

*Figure 12: Concise Oxford Dictionary, 6th edition, 1973*
DIVIDING ENTRIES: [BRACKETS] AND (PARENTHESES)

Brackets and parentheses can be used to divide an entry into component parts, or to indicate a special status for the surrounded word, usually it is an example, or some kind of coded information. In many dictionaries, brackets have a catch-all function for any annotation or categorization of the definition, for example editorial comments ('Not in use') or subject field labels ('Botany,' 'Pharmacy'). An early user of such labels was Nathan Bailey and his Dictionarium Britannicum (1730) (left) that uses square brackets for these and exactly the same style for etymologies. Noah Webster’s American Dictionary of the English Language (1828) (right) also uses square brackets indiscriminately for etymologies, simple annotations and cross-references.

Figure 13: Nathan Bailey, Dictionarium Britannicum, 1730
Figure 14: Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828

Etymologies, conventionally placed immediately after the headword or at the very end of the entry, have been surrounded by brackets from the earliest printed dictionaries. A Table Alphabetical (1604) includes single-letter codes in parentheses such as (g) for a word of Greek origin. Nathan Bailey’s Universal Etymological Dictionary of English (1727) and Dictionarium Britannicum use square brackets around etymological information, and these become the norm, used by Johnson (1755) exclusively for etymologies. Noah Webster (1828) uses square brackets for any editorial note, but the association of square brackets with etymologies was reinforced and improved by James Murray’s use in the OED (1884–) (figure 15).

Murray’s OED layout features were prefigured by Robert Hunter’s Encyclopedic Dictionary (1879), including the use of bolder square brackets to surround etymologies (figure 16). Hunter and Murray both used bold slab-serif type for headwords to
contrast with the lighter roman used for text; the bolder square brackets give clear boundaries to the etymology which, in these dictionaries, can include many different fonts, and run on for several lines within the headword paragraph. The bold square brackets have a unifying as well as delimiting function.

Parentheses can be used to indicate examples, either to indicate usage options within a definition, or to separate off illustrative quotations. The use of parenthesized words in a definition is intended to offer the reader the opportunity to substitute any appropriate word ('abandon ... to yield (oneself) without restraint'), or indicate a specifier or modifier of some kind ('pitch ... To hit (a golf ball) in a high arc...'). The parenthesized words may themselves be highlighted by a font change.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate uses angle brackets to distinguish illustrative examples from the parenthesized modifiers (figure 17); this is necessary because the illustrative examples are set in roman, and therefore have to be set off from the definition. Collins English Dictionary (2000) simply italicizes the examples (figure 18), introducing them with a colon, a much less fussy and more elegant solution. (Colins in the Collegiate and other Merriam-Webster dictionaries have a special function: to introduce the senses and sub-senses of a definition. This allows unnumbered sub-sub-senses to run on.)

Figure 15: The Oxford English Dictionary, 1884–1933
Figure 16: Robert Hunter, The Encyclopaedic Dictionary, 1879

Figure 17: Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition, 1998
Figure 18: Collins English Dictionary, 5th edition, 2000
abandon /əˈbændərn/; abandons, abandoning, abandoned. 1 If you abandon something such as a place or object, you leave it permanently or for a long time, especially because you do not want to look after it any longer. eg You're not supposed to abandon your car on the motorway.

2 If you abandon someone, especially someone you have responsibility for, you leave them and never go back to them. eg He then abandoned her and went off to live in Nigeria.

3 If you abandon something such as a piece of work, plan, or activity, you stop doing it before it is finished. eg I had abandoned the search.

4 If you abandon an idea or way of thinking, you stop thinking in that way. eg Reputable scholars have now abandoned the notion... I have abandoned the idea of consistency.

5 If you abandon ship, you get off it because it is sinking.

6 If you abandon yourself to an emotion, you feel and think only about that emotion and nothing else. eg She abandoned herself to grief.

7 If you do something with abandon, you behave in a wild, uncontrolled way and do not think or care.

Figure 19: Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary, 1987

Parentheses can be avoided if the writing style of the dictionary is changed from a telegraphic one to one that is more expansive. The Collins COBUILD dictionaries (figure 19) pioneered this approach. All the contextual information is contained within the narrative definition, and the illustrative quotation runs on directly, introduced by eg.

CUSTOMIZED PUNCTUATION:
BULLETS, WINGDINGS AND ARROWS

If we think of a punctuation mark as an indicator of a text element's boundary, then we can consider bullets and other arbitrary marks as a form of punctuation. Meaningful graphic devices that categorize entries or senses, such as the pictograms in the Oxford Dictionary of New Words (figure 20) and the Oxford Starter Dictionaries, are substitutes for subject field labels and are visual text rather than punctuation, despite their prominence. Similarly, the dash, either swung (COD, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate) or plain (Concise Cambridge Italian Dictionary), as a marker for the headword, is a text symbol, not punctuation (see figures 17, 21 and 24).

Dictionaries use square, round and triangular bullets, both solid and open, to draw attention to the start of some sub-sections, but there is no standard convention between dictionaries to assign these to any hierarchy. Not quite symbols (because they do not categorize) and not quite abbreviations (although they are compact.
compound1 [noun] /ˈkɒmpaʊnd/ a thing that is composed of two or more separate elements; a mixture of two or more things: the air smelled like a compound of diesel and petrol fumes.

(also chemical compound) a substance formed from two or more elements chemically united in fixed proportions: a compound of hydrogen and oxygen | lead compounds.

a word made up of two or more existing words.

► adjective /ˈkɒmpaʊnd/ [attrib.] made up or consisting of several parts or elements, in particular:

(of a word) made up of two or more existing words or elements: a compound noun. a (of interest) payable on both capital and the accumulated interest: compound interest.

Compare with SIMPLE. Biology (especially of a leaf, flower, or eye) consisting of two or more simple elements:

a compound leaf, flower, or eye) consisting of two or more simple elements.

enough [det. & pron. as much or as many as is necessary or desirable. adj. 1 to the required degree or extent. 2 to a moderate degree.

- PHRASES enough is enough no more will be tolerated.

enough said is all understood and there is no need to say more.

- ORIGIN OE genāg, of Gmc origin.

en papillote /ˈɛn pəˈpiːloʊt/ adj. & adv. (of food) cooked and served in a paper wrapper.

Figure 20: Oxford Dictionary of New Words, 1991
Figure 21: Concise Cambridge Italian Dictionary, 1975
Figure 22: New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998
Figure 23: Encarta Concise English Dictionary, 2001
Figure 24: Concise Oxford Dictionary, 10th edition, 2000
Figure 25: The Random House Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged Edition, 1966

substitutes for a word), arrows and directional markers are used to indicate derivatives, variant forms and cross-references.

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1966) uses a less-than sign to introduce an etymological formation, to imply ‘formed from’; because the most recent form is given first, the arrow direction is right to left, indicating the development of the etymology (figure 25).
TECHNICAL PUNCTUATION: PRONUNCIATIONS

Various forms of respelling the headword are used to indicate pronunciation. For English language learners’ dictionaries, transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet is standard, but respelling systems using length signs and stress marks are used for ‘home market’ dictionaries in the US and UK. There are conventions that the slash is used to surround phonemic transcriptions and that square brackets are used for phonetic transcriptions, but publishers seem to choose their own styles. Oxford uses slashes, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate* uses backslashes, *Collins English Dictionary* uses parentheses.

TRANSLATION AND COMBINATION:
SYMBOLS AS VISUAL PUNCTUATION

While the plus sign has regularly been used in etymologies and to explain compound forms, the use of the equals sign to indicate a translation was pioneered by the *Oxford Starter* bilingual dictionaries (1997) (figure 26). This decision faced some opposition, as it can be argued that a translation may not be the exact equivalent

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**fall**

1 verb
- (if it's a person) = tomber (I + être)
  she fell to the ground = elle est tombée par terre
- (to come down, to be reduced) = baisser
- (other uses)
  to fall asleep = s’endormir (I + être)
  to fall ill = tomber malade (I + être)
  to fall in love with someone = tomber amoureux/amoureuse de quelqu’un

2 noun
- (in prices, temperature)
  a fall = une baisse
  a fall in prices = une baisse des prix
- (US English) (autumn)
  fall = l’automne (masculine)

**fall down**
- (if it's a person) = tomber (I + être)
- (if it's a building) = s’effondrer (I + être)

**fall off**
- (from somewhere) = tomber (I + être)

**fall out**
- (from quarrel) = se brouiller (I + être)

**Figure 26: Oxford Starter French Dictionary, 1997**
that the equals sign implies. But for a range of simple dictionaries with vocabulary stripped down to what was essential for the school language curriculum, the clarity of the symbol seems entirely appropriate. The *Starter French* shows extreme paragraphing, no abbreviations, the use of bullets to identify different translation contexts and the equals sign to reinforce the start of the translation; parentheses surround the contextualizing information in the original language, and grammatical information in the target language. The bold exclamation mark functions as a warning code that the verb in the translation takes *être* rather than *avoir*.

**ARE DICTIONARIES ABANDONING PUNCTUATION?**

More recent dictionaries such as the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2001), the *Collins English Dictionary* (2004, below), and the *Oxford Compact English Dictionary* (2008, below) have significantly reduced the amount of punctuation on the page. End of sentence full-stops have been abandoned at the end of senses (except in the Oxford), and full-stops avoided after abbreviations and sense numbers; the articulation depends almost entirely on font changes.

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**keynote** (ˈkiː,ˈnɔːt) n
1a a central or determining principle in a speech, literary work, etc 1b (as modifier): a keynote speech 2 the note upon which a scale or key is based; tonic > vb *keynotes, keynoting, keynoted* (tr) 3 to deliver a keynote address to (a political convention, etc)

**keypad** (ˈkiː,ˈpæd) n 1 a small panel with a set of buttons for operating a teletext system, electronic calculator, etc
2 key-punch n 1 Also called: card punch a device having a keyboard that is operated manually to transfer data onto punched cards, paper tape, etc > vb *key-punch* 2 to transfer (data) by using a key punch

**keyring drive** n computing another name for *pocket drive*

**key signature** n music a group of sharps or flats appearing at the beginning of each stave line to indicate the key in which a piece, section, etc, is to be performed

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**key** noun (pl. *keys*)
1 a small piece of shaped metal which is inserted into a lock and turned to open or close it, 2 an instrument for grasping and turning a screw, peg, or nut, 3 a lever pressed down by the finger in playing an instrument such as the organ, piano, or flute, 4 each of several buttons on a panel for operating a typewriter or computer terminal, 5 a means of achieving or understanding something: *discipline seems to be the key to her success*, 6 an explanatory list of symbols used in a map or table, 7 a word or system for solving a code, 8 a group of musical notes based on a particular note and comprising a scale, 9 roughness on a surface, provided to assist adhesion of plaster or other material.

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**Figure 27:** *Collins English Dictionary Desktop Edition*, 2004

**Figure 28:** *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edition, 2005

Digital text composition has removed the constraint that existed throughout the period of mechanical and photomechanical composition: the limit on the number of fonts that could be set together economically. Hand-setting had no such constraint; the *OED*’s rich typography might not have existed had its composition started some
twenty years later, after the introduction of the Monotype machine. A wider range of
typographic resources, such as the ability to use both a serif and a sanserif typeface
family in several weight and width variants means that dictionary designers can
contemplate a one-to-one relationship between text element and typographic
presentation. This was simply not possible in earlier times, when the same italic
had to do service for a variety of functions. Multi-font dictionaries can eliminate
inter-element punctuation because the mapping of typography to structure is clear.
Typically designers can allocate sanserif fonts to the metalanguage of the dictionary,
and serif fonts to the plain text of definitions, adding a separate dimension to
the weight axis that can indicate headwords, derived forms, phrases and cross-
references. Careful use of type designs that can stand extreme degrees of condensing
allows grammatical and subject labels to be spelled out in full, and not be reduced
to abbreviations. Types (typically sanserif) with extreme tonal ranges (extra bold
to extra light) can provide color contrast. A comparison of a limited typographic
range and an extended one are shown in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary's 4th
and 5th editions (figures 29 and 30). In the 4th edition, a single italic font has many
functions; in the 5th edition these functions are differentiated by font.

Online dictionaries are absolved of the fundamental constraint of a printed
dictionary: space. There is no need for elements in an entry to be run on to save
space, and a return can be made to text articulated by space; less dependent on

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vastidity /'va:sti di/ n. rare. E17. [Irreg. var. of
VASTITY, after wds in -idity.] Vastness.

Shakes. Meas. for M. A restraint, Though all the
world's vastidity you had, To a determined scope.

vector /'vektər/ n. E18. [L = carrier, traveller,
rider, from vect- pa. ppl stem of vēhere carry,
convey; see -OR.] 1 Astron. = radius vector s.v.
RADIUS n. Only in 18. 2 a math. A quantity
having direction as well as magnitude, denoted
by a line drawn from its original to its final
set of two or more numbers (interpretable as
the coordinates of a point); a matrix with one row or
one column. Also, any element of a vector
space. E20. c Aeronaut. A course to be taken by
an aircraft, or steered by a pilot. M20. d
Computing. A sequence of consecutive locations
in memory; a series of items occupying such a
sequence and identified within it by means of
one subscript; spec. one serving as the address to
which a program must jump when interrupted,
and supplied by the source of the interruption.
M20. 3 a Med. & Biol. An organism, esp. an

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vastidity /va:'sti dri/ noun rare. E17.
[Irreg. var. of VASTITY, after wds in -idity.]
Vastness.

Shakes. Meas. for M. A restraint, Though all the world's
vastidity you had, To a determined scope.

vector /'vektər/ noun E18.
[Latin = carrier, traveller, rider, from vect- pa. ppl stem of vēhere
carry, convey; see -OR.] 1 ASTRONOMY = radius vector s.v.
RADIUS noun Only in 18.

2 a MATH. A quantity having direction as well as
magnitude, denoted by a line drawn from its original
to its final position. Cf. SCALAR noun M19. b MATH. An
ordered set of two or more numbers (interpretable as
the coordinates of a point); a matrix with one row or
one column. Also, any element of a vector space. E20.

C. AERONAUTICS. A course to be taken by an aircraft,
steered by a pilot. M20. d COMPUTING. A sequence of
consecutive locations in memory; a series of items
occupying such a sequence and identified within it by
means of one subscript; spec. one serving as the address
to which a program must jump when interrupted, and
supplied by the source of the interruption. M20.

3 a MEDICINE & BIOLOGY. An organism, esp. an insect or
other arthropod, which causes the transmission of a pathogen

Figure 29: Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 4th edition, 1993
Figure 30: Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 5th edition, 2002
visual punctuation by change of font or special character. Indeed, the (continuing) lack of a wide range of standardly available fonts for online browsing militates against over-complex typography (Apple's on-screen implementation of the *New Oxford American Dictionary* is shown). Webfonts accessed from a server and not dependent on the reader's browser, may provide the solution. When dictionary websites can efficiently use webfonts to render their contents as subtle and effective as the best of those used in print, the typography of the online dictionary will have come of age.

Figure 31: *New Oxford American Dictionary*, Apple OS 10.6 implementation, 2011
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Figure 1 is reproduced from a book in the English Faculty Library, University of Oxford: XW1 [1749]. Figures 2, 3, 6 and 16 are reproduced from books in the Bodleian Library, Oxford: Figure 2: Vet. A5 e.6554; Figure 3: Don. d.224; Figure 6: 3021 e.307; Figure 16: 30254 d.19. In general, entries from contemporary dictionaries are reproduced as near to actual size as is practicable, and those from earlier dictionaries are reduced to fit. I would like to thank Patrick Hanks for pointing me to the examples shown in Figures 7 and 8, and to John Simpson for access to the OED library, where several of the items shown were photographed by Paul Lucas.

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Dictionaries discussed (publications after 1850 are arranged by title)


**Other reading**


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