

No lightweight

This is just so comprehensive (and weighty) would students be better off with a standard dictionary?

MERRIAM-WEBSTER'S ADVANCED LEARNER'S ENGLISH DICTIONARY (Merriam-Webster, Inc.) 978-0-87779-550-6

The amount and arrangement of information contained in the massive *Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary (MWALED)* is truly impressive, but who will choose to purchase such a behemoth, given the many lighter alternatives, especially electronic dictionaries now available?

The paperback weighs in at 3 pounds and 12 ounces (1.9 kilos). When Degoncir Gonçalves, a Tefl student from Brazil, first looked at the book, his reaction was quick and succinct: 'It is so big, and is hard for people to use every day.' Gonçalves had a clear preference for an electronic dictionary and was confident that most fellow students would concur. 'I think it would be a good reference book, maybe for libraries or for teachers to use, with activities to stimulate students, but I think students prefer a smaller book, electronic dictionary or just use internet for daily use,' said our student reviewer.

The nearly 2,000 pages provide an incredible wealth of information for serious and advanced learners of English. Some might feel that once a student is ready for such a mam-

moth work, they may as well move into using regular dictionaries; I would venture that many ESL instructors would agree.

Nonetheless, many features make *MWALED* appealing for committed middle- or high-level students. The bonus that jumps out is the addition of example sentences for many entries. Printed in bright blue, these provide the contextualisation that can be vital to help students go beyond mere comprehension to learn proper usage of vocabulary on their own. Self-taught learners could especially benefit from the examples.

As with any learner's dictionary, the *MWALED* uses the simplest defining words possible, and provides additional information (transitive or intransitive verbs, for example) that standard dictionaries may omit. The editors also avoid excessive abbreviations and extraneous information, yet have included a multitude of differing definitions and idiomatic usages.

For example, 'cover' rates a few inches in the standard dictionary and another learner's dictionary we used as comparisons, but spans a full page in *MWALED*, with definitions of idioms and phrases including 'cover charge' and 'to cover the bases'. Similarly, all the dictionaries define 'cow' and provide a picture, but only the *MWALED* has 'have a cow', 'Holy Cow',

and cross-references 'sacred cow' and 'cash cow'. Both British and American expressions, idioms and slang are included.

Gonçalves appreciated the lengthy (eleven pages) explanation of features such as grammatical labels, forms and tenses. The book also includes appendices of nearly 100 pages – lists and explanations such as common names, weights and measures, and irregular verbs. However, the pronunciation guides were no more enlightening than those found elsewhere, with single pages both fore and aft containing the same basic listing of sounds and samples. The online supplement (www.learnersdictionary.com) gives pronunciations, and also includes a blog which is evolving into a forum on commonly confused or misused words. Our Brazilian learner also reviewed the online materials but was not overly impressed, and he mentioned other learning websites that he felt offered much more information, also at no extra cost.

The *MWALED* is an impressive learning tool. If Merriam-Webster is content to have the book sold to libraries and dictionary enthusiasts, they may be pleased; if they could put the same content into an electronic device of the size and weight (and at a price) common in today's world, they'd have a clear winner.

REVIEWS IN BRIEF

with the Bournemouth English Book Centre



BOOK OF THE MONTH

NEW FRAMEWORK PRE-INTERMEDIATE (Richmond Publishing) Ben Goldstein 978-84-668-1941-1

This is an updated version of the popular multi-level course for adults and young adults. The twelve units cover language and vocabulary, skills and phonology. There are sections called Takeaway English which cover functional language for survival situations and 'The real thing', which focuses on 'natural chunks' of language, such as 'I suppose'. The introduction to the teacher's book gives a useful over-

view of key principles in the methodology, such as personalisation, the commitment to communicative tasks and the emphasis on learner autonomy.

The range of components is impressive. The teacher's resource book includes extra material, such as song lyrics and exam practice worksheets. The small, pull-out reference guide is useful. One highlight is the World English DVD, which offers a wealth of non-native speaker accents. The CD-Rom is however somewhat sparse in design. The inclusion of 'fresh, dynamic' topics is largely successful. Some themes, such as getting drunk, are risky and should be approached with caution. The material will appeal to young adults. Worth investigation.

This is part of the Business Minimax series, a set of reference materials in a concertina-folded format. There are sixteen sides in all, laminated. Sections include 'What makes a good meeting?' and functional language, such as interrupting.

The list of cultural tips is excellent, and there is a comprehensive list of dos and don'ts.

The layout of the Minimax is pleasing, and its portability a key feature. This Minimax could benefit busy people needing a refresher. Although it could be used by native speakers, non-native speakers will additionally benefit from the language input. If a Minimax is used as a stand-alone product, it may disappoint, due to its essential brevity, but as a follow-up to a training course on meetings, it is excellent.

ADVANCED LANGUAGE PRACTICE (Macmillan) Michael Vince 978-0-2307-2706-9

This is now the third version of this reference and practice book aimed at C1 level. The coverage of language is comprehensive. The grammar sections include areas such as inversion and emphasis. It is refreshing to see a relaxed approach to grammar, for example recognising the importance of context as to why we change the tense, and the inclusion of some non-

standard forms. The twenty themed vocabulary sections are useful.

The book includes engaging activities, although it is quite heavy on gap-fills, which should appeal to analytical learners. The CD-Rom is a new feature, and contains onscreen as well as printable tests. Although this book could be used in class, it seems more appropriate for self study. The colour pictures are often amusing. Recommended.

ENGLISH FOR MEETINGS (York Associates) Bob Dignen 978-1-900991-20-9

Reviews by Pete Sharma

for the Bournemouth English Book Centre

TOP 15 BOOKS

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