Unlock the
Oxford 3000

The words students need
to know to succeed in English

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Which words should students learn to **succeed** in English?

Patrick White, *Head of Dictionaries and Reference Grammar in the English Language Teaching Division of Oxford University Press* explains why students ask this question, and what might be the answer.

Words are a source of endless fascination. Ask a hundred people what their favourite word is, or which words irritate them the most, and you'll get a hundred different answers and some very strong opinions. Ask them which words they believe a learner needs to know and you'll soon feel confused and overwhelmed by the diversity of the answers. As language teachers, we are naturally curious about words that we encounter for the first time, and the way words change their meaning. We like finding opportunities to use words and expressions we have recently learned.

But it takes time and effort to learn new words, so it's not surprising that students ask for guidance. This brochure introduces a resource which, we believe, helps to answer that question.

The resource is the **Oxford 3000**, a list of the 3000 words that students really need to know in English. Created in collaboration with teachers and language experts, the **Oxford 3000** words are included in most of our dictionaries, including the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. The **Oxford 3000** is also incorporated into coursebooks such as *Q Skills*, *Aim High* and our new course for adult learners, *Navigate*.

In the following pages you'll find out exactly what the **Oxford 3000** is, how it was researched and compiled, and – most importantly – how it helps learners.

confident enjoyment positive

What is the **Oxford 3000**?

The **Oxford 3000** is a list of the 3000 most useful and important words that students need to learn in English.

It includes words that are frequently used in English, and some words that are not so frequent but which are important to know.

The **Oxford 3000** words are marked with a key in our learners' dictionaries, and are available on the www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com website. You can look up the entry for each word, and hear it pronounced in either British or American English.

At elementary level our learners' dictionaries focus on the **Oxford 2000**, which includes 2000 of the words on the **Oxford 3000** list.

In a recent global survey, **60%** of teachers said they would recommend using the **Oxford 3000** because it expands vocabulary.

▼ These are the words teachers in a recent global survey used to describe the effect the **Oxford 3000** has had on their students:

focus enriched interest productive efficient autonomous concentrate curious

How was the **Oxford 3000** created?

We had three key requirements in creating the **Oxford 3000**:

1: sources – to provide evidence of how the English language is actually used

2: criteria – to use when analysing our sources

3: expertise – to provide insights into the vocabulary needs of learners of English

Sources

The **Oxford 3000** is a corpus-based list. A corpus is a database of language from different subject areas and contexts. When lexicographers analyse a particular word in the corpus, the corpus shows all of the occurrences of that word, the contexts in which it is used, and the grammatical patterns of the surrounding words.

The **Oxford 3000** is informed by the:

- British National Corpus (100 million words)
- Oxford Corpus Collection (developed by Oxford University Press and including different types of English – American English, business English etc.)

By using this combination of corpora, we can understand how English is currently used, and which words are used most frequently.

Criteria

When deciding which words should be in the **Oxford 3000**, we used three core criteria:

- **frequency** – the words which appear most often in English
- **range** – the words which appear frequently AND across a broad range of contexts
- **familiarity** – words that are not necessarily used very often, but are important in general English

Did you know?

'When we analysed our corpus, we discovered that we talk about 'Friday' and 'Saturday' more frequently than 'Tuesday' or 'Wednesday'. But when you learn the days of the week of course you learn all of them at the same time – not just the most frequently used ones, because it's useful to know them all.'

Joanna Turnbull, Editor of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary,* 8th edition

Expertise

A group of lexicographers and around 70 English language teachers worked together on the **Oxford 3000**, bringing classroom experience and linguistic expertise together to create a list that truly supports the needs of language learners.

The lexicographers brought their own teaching experience together with many years of experience in dictionary research and development. The teachers came from English language schools all over the world.

Why use the **Oxford 3000**?

When our research team looked at the corpora using the criteria explained on page 4, they found that around 3000 words covered 80–85% of vocabulary in a general English text.

Here are the results of our research into frequency and coverage – that is, how much text is covered by the thousand most frequent words, the thousand second-most frequent words, the thousand third-most frequent words and so on.

most frequent word families	coverage	total
1st 1000	74.1%	
2nd 1000	7.2%	2000 = 81.3% coverage (74.1% + 7.2%)
3rd 1000	3.9%	3000 = 85.2% coverage (81.3% + 3.9%)
4th 1000	2.4%	4000 = 87.6% coverage (85.2% + 2.4%)
5th 1000	1.8%	5000 = 89.4% coverage (87.6% + 1.8%)

12,500 word families cover 95% of text.

By learning the first 3000 words, students build a very strong vocabulary which covers a significant majority of the words they will see in texts.

Once they have learned these words and know them well, students can focus their efforts on acquiring more specialist vocabulary that they need to succeed in their chosen area of language study – for example, learning business or academic language for work or further studies.

The **Oxford 3000** provides a springboard for expanding vocabulary – see page 9.

3000 words covered
80–85%
of vocabulary

The **Oxford 3000 –** the key to effective and efficient vocabulary-building

Using the **Oxford 3000** with the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* gives students the tools to expand their vocabulary to around 7,500 words, which will allow them to communicate in English at an advanced level.

The **Oxford 3000** words appear in the dictionary as a keyword entry, and are shown with a key symbol.

Many keyword entries include additional information about how the word is used in idioms or phrasal verbs, as well as showing similar or related words.

Use the entry for 'mark' and these activities to introduce an **Oxford 3000** word to your class. They might know 'mark' already, but do they know all the related words and meanings?

Look at the entry for 'mark' and answer these questions.

1. What would an American say instead of the British idiom up to the mark?
2. How many meanings are given for mark as a noun?
3. Which meaning of the verb is being used in this sentence: I had a party to mark my first ten years in the business?
4. Can you find a more specific word for a mark made by ink being dropped on a surface?
5. If you are off the mark, are you close to the correct answer or not?

Look at the Synonyms note and choose a suitable word meaning 'mark' which can fill the gaps in these sentences.

1. These _____ will be difficult to remove at low temperatures.
2. There were long dirty _____ on the window where the birds had made a mess.
3. The children's faces were covered with _____ of jam.
4. We could see tiny _____ of gold on the bottom of the stream.
5. Her essay was covered with ink _____.

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* CD-ROM includes more activities like these.

mari·ner /ˈmærɪnə(r)/ *noun* (*old-fashioned* or *literary*) a sailor

mar·io·nette /ˌmæriəˈnet/ *noun* a PUPPET whose arms, legs and head are moved by strings

mari·tal /ˈmærɪtl/ *adj.* [only before noun] connected with marriage or with the relationship between a husband and wife: *marital difficulties/breakdown*

marital 'status *noun* [U] (*formal*) (used especially on official forms) the fact of whether you are single, married, etc: *questions about age, sex and marital status*

mari·time /ˈmærɪtaɪm/ *adj.* **1** connected with the sea or ships: *a maritime museum* **2** (*formal*) near the sea: *maritime Antarctica*

mar·joram /ˈmɑːdʒərəm; NAmE ˈmɑːrdʒ-/ *noun* [U] a plant with leaves that smell sweet and are used in cooking as a HERB, often when dried

mark ❶ /mɑːk; NAmE mɑːrk/ *verb, noun*

■ *verb*

- **WRITE/DRAW 1** ♪ [T] to write or draw a symbol, line, etc. on sth in order to give information about it: *~ (with B) Items marked with an asterisk can be omitted.* ◇ *~B on A Prices are marked on the goods.* ◇ *~sb/sth + adj. The teacher marked her absent* (= made a mark by her name to show that she was absent). ◇ *Why have you marked this wrong?* ◇ *Do not open any mail marked 'Confidential'.*
- **SPOIL/DAMAGE 2** ♪ [T, I] *~(sth)* to make a mark on sth in a way that spoils or damages it; to become spoilt or damaged in this way: *A large purple scar marked his cheek.* ◇ *The surfaces are made from a material that doesn't mark.*
- **SHOW POSITION 3** ♪ [T] *~sth* to show the position of sth **SYN** indicate: *The cross marks the spot where the body was found.* ◇ *The route has been marked in red.*
- **CELEBRATE 4** ♪ *~sth* to celebrate or officially remember an event that you consider to be important: *a ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the war*
- **SHOW CHANGE 5** [T] *~sth* to be a sign that sth new is going to happen: *This speech may mark a change in government policy.* ◇ *The agreement marks a new phase in international relations.*
- **GIVE MARK/GRADE 6** ♪ [T, I] *~(sth)* (*especially BrE*) to give marks to students' work: *I hate marking exam papers.* ◇ *I spend at least six hours a week marking.* ⊃ COMPARE GRADE
- **GIVE PARTICULAR QUALITY 7** [T, usually passive] (*formal*) to give sb/sth a particular quality or character **SYN** characterize: *~sb/sth a life marked by suffering* ◇ *~sb/sth as sth He was marked as an enemy of the poor.*
- **PAY ATTENTION 8** [T] (*old-fashioned*) used to tell sb to pay careful attention to sth: *~sth There'll be trouble over this, mark my words.* ◇ *~what, how, etc ... You mark what I say, John.*
- **IN SPORT 9** [T] *~sb* (in a team game) to stay close to an opponent in order to prevent them from getting the ball: *Hughes was marking Taylor.* ◇ *Our defence had him closely marked.* ⊃ SEE ALSO MARKING

IDM ,mark 'time **1** to pass the time while you wait for sth more interesting: *I'm just marking time in this job—I'm hoping to get into journalism.* **2** (of soldiers) to make marching movements without moving forwards ,mark 'you (*old-fashioned, informal, especially BrE*) used to remind sb of sth they should consider in a particular case: *She hasn't had much success yet. Mark you, she tries hard.*

PHRV ,mark sb 'down to reduce the mark/grade given to sb in an exam, etc: *She was marked down because of poor grammar.* ,mark sb 'down as sth (*especially BrE*) to recognize sb as a particular type: *I hadn't got him marked down as a liberal.* ,mark sth↔'down **1** to reduce the price of sth: *All goods have been marked down by 15%.* **OPP** mark up ⊃ RELATED NOUN MARKDOWN **2** to make a note of sth for future use or action: *The factory is already marked down for demolition.* ,mark sth↔'off **(from sb/sth)** to make sb/sth seem different from other people or things: *Each of London's districts had a distinct character that marked it off from its neighbours.* ,mark sth↔'off to separate sth by marking a line between it and sth else: *The playing area was marked off with a white line.* ,mark sb 'out as/for sth to make people recognize

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sb as special in some way: *She was marked out for early promotion.* ,mark sth↔'out to draw lines to show the edges of sth: *They marked out a tennis court on the lawn.* ,mark sth↔'up **1** to increase the price of sth: *Share prices were marked up as soon as trading started.* **OPP** mark down ⊃ RELATED NOUN MARKUP **2** (*specialist*) to mark or correct a text, etc., for example for printing: *to mark up a manuscript*

■ *noun*

- **SPOT/DIRT 1** ♪ a small area of dirt, a spot or a cut on a surface that spoils its appearance: *The children left dirty marks all over the kitchen floor.* ◇ *a burn/scratch mark* ◇ *Detectives found no marks on the body.* **2** ♪ a noticeable spot or area of colour on the body of a person or an animal which helps you to recognize them: *a horse with a white mark on its head* ◇ *He was about six feet tall, with no distinguishing marks.* ⊃ SYNONYMS AT PATCH ⊃ SEE ALSO BIRTHMARK, MARKING
- **SYMBOL 3** ♪ a written or printed symbol that is used as a sign of sth, for example the quality of sth or who made or owns it: *punctuation marks* ◇ *Any piece of silver bearing his mark is extremely valuable.* ◇ *I put a mark in the margin to remind me to check the figure.* ⊃ SEE ALSO EXCLAMATION MARK, QUESTION MARK, TRADEMARK
- **SIGN 4** a sign that a quality or feeling exists: *On the day of the funeral businesses remained closed as a mark of respect.* ◇ *Such coolness under pressure is the mark of a champion.*
- **STANDARD/GRADE 5** ♪ (*especially BrE*) a number or letter that is given to show the standard of sb's work or performance or is given to sb for answering sth correctly: *to get a good/poor mark in English* ◇ *to give sb a high/low mark* ◇ *What's the pass mark* (= the mark you need in order to pass)? ◇ *I got full marks* (= the highest mark possible) *in the spelling test.* ◇ (*ironic*) *'You're wearing a tie!' 'Full marks for observation.'* ⊃ SEE ALSO BLACK MARK, GRADE *noun* ⊃ WORDFINDER NOTE AT EXAM
- **LEVEL 6** a level or point that sth reaches that is thought to be important: *Unemployment has passed the four million mark.* ◇ *She was leading at the half-way mark.*

▼ SYNONYMS

mark

stain • fingerprint • streak • speck • blot • smear • spot

These are all words for a small area of dirt or another substance on a surface.

mark a small area of dirt or other substance on the surface of sth, especially one that spoils its appearance: *The kids left dirty marks all over the kitchen floor.*

stain a dirty mark on sth that is difficult to remove, especially one made by a liquid: *blood stains*

fingerprint a mark on a surface made by the pattern of lines on the end of a person's finger, often used by the police to identify criminals: *Her fingerprints were all over the gun.*

streak a long thin mark or line that is a different colour from the surface it is on: *She had streaks of grey in her hair.*

speck a very small mark, spot or piece of a substance on sth: *There isn't a speck of dust anywhere in the house.*

blot a spot or dirty mark left on sth by a substance such as ink or paint being dropped on a surface

smear a mark made by sth such as oil or paint being spread or rubbed on a surface

spot a small dirty mark on sth: *There were grease spots all over the walls.*

PATTERNS
- a streak/speck/blot/smear/spot **of** sth
- a **greasy** mark/stain/smear
- an **ink** mark/stain/blot/spot
- a **grease** mark/stain/spot
- to **leave** a mark/stain/fingerprint/streak/speck/blot/smear

M

- **MACHINE/VEHICLE 7** Mark (followed by a number) a particular type or model of a machine or vehicle: *the Mark II engine*
- **IN GAS OVEN 8** Mark (*BrE*) (followed by a number) a particular level of temperature in a gas oven: *Preheat the oven to gas Mark 6.*
- **SIGNATURE 9** a cross made on a document instead of a signature by sb who is not able to write their name
- **TARGET 10** (*formal*) a target: *Of the blows delivered, barely half found their mark.* ◇ *to hit/miss the mark*
- **GERMAN MONEY 11** = DEUTSCHMARK

IDM be close to/near the 'mark to be fairly accurate in a guess, statement, etc. be off the 'mark not to be accurate in a guess, statement, etc: *No, you're way off the mark.* be on the 'mark to be accurate or correct: *That estimate was right on the mark.* get off the 'mark to start scoring, especially in CRICKET: *Stewart got off the mark with a four.* ,hit/,miss the 'mark to succeed/fail in achieving or guessing sth: *He blushed furiously and Robyn knew she had hit the mark.* ,leave your/its/a 'mark (on sth/sb) to have an effect on sth/sb, especially a bad one, that lasts for a long time: *Such a traumatic experience was bound to leave its mark on the children.* ,make your/a 'mark (on sth) to become famous and successful in a particular area not be/feel ,up to the 'mark (*old-fashioned, BrE*) not to feel as well or lively as usual on your ,marks, get ,set, 'go! used to tell runners in a race to get ready and then to start quick/slow off the 'mark fast/slow in reacting to a situation ,up to the 'mark (*BrE*) (*NAmE* ,up to 'snuff*) as good as it/they should be **SYN** up to scratch: *Your work isn't really up to the mark.* ⊃ MORE AT OVERSTEP, TOE v., WIDE *adj.*

mark·down /ˈmɑːkdaʊn; NAmE ˈmɑːrk-/ *noun* [usually sing.] a reduction in price

marked /mɑːkt; NAmE mɑːrkt/ *adj.* **1** easy to see **SYN** noticeable, distinct: *a marked difference/improvement* ◇ *a marked increase in profits* ◇ *She is quiet and studious, in marked contrast to her sister.* **2** (*linguistics*) (of a word or form of a word) showing a particular feature or style, such as being formal or informal **OPP** unmarked ▸ **mark·ed·ly** /ˈmɑːkɪdli; NAmE ˈmɑːrk-/ *adv.*: *Her background is markedly different from her husband's.* ◇ *This year's sales have risen markedly.*

IDM a marked 'man/woman a person who is in danger because their enemies want to harm them

mark·er /ˈmɑːkə(r); NAmE ˈmɑːrk-/ *noun* **1** [C] an object or a sign that shows the position of sth: *a boundary marker* ◇ *He placed a marker where the ball had landed.* **2** [sing.] a *~(of/for sth)* a sign that sth exists or that shows what it is like: *Price is not always an accurate marker of quality.* **3** (*BrE also* 'marker pen) a pen with a thick FELT tip ⊃ VISUAL VOCAB PAGE V54 **4** (*BrE*) (*NAmE* grader) a person who marks/grades students' work or exam papers **5** (*BrE*) (in team games, especially football (SOCCER)) a player who stays close to a player on the other team in order to stop them getting the ball

mar·ket ❶ /ˈmɑːkɪt; NAmE ˈmɑːrk-/ *noun, verb*

■ *noun* **1** ♪ [C] an occasion when people buy and sell goods; the open area or building where they meet to do this: *a fruit/flower/antiques market* ◇ *an indoor/a street market* ◇ *market stalls/traders* ◇ *We buy our fruit and vegetables at the market.* ◇ *Thursday is market day.* ◇ *a market town* (= a town in Britain where a regular market is or was held) ⊃ VISUAL VOCAB PAGE V3 ⊃ SEE ALSO FARMERS' MARKET **2** ♪ [sing.] business or trade, or the amount of trade in a particular type of goods: *the world market in coffee* ◇ *They have increased their share of the market by 10%.* ◇ *the property/job market* (= the number and type of houses, jobs, etc. that are available) ◇ *They have cornered the market in sportswear* (= sell the most). ⊃ WORDFINDER NOTE AT TRADE ⊃ COLLOCATIONS AT BUSINESS **3** ♪ [C] a particular area, country or section of the population that might buy goods: *the Japanese market* ◇ *the global/domestic market* **4** ♪ [sing.] *~(for sth)* the number of people who want to buy sth **SYN** demand: *a growing/declining market for second-hand cars* **5** (*often the market*) [sing.] people who buy and sell goods in competition with each other: *The market will decide if the TV station has any future.* ◇ *a market-based/market-driven/market-led economy* ⊃ SEE ALSO BLACK

How to use the **Oxford 3000**

Create structure with vocabulary learning

The **Oxford 3000** is a ready-made list of words that have been carefully selected to meet the needs of language learners. It's a list you can trust, and is ideal for class or homework activities.

Bjorn Candel, an English language teacher in the United Arab Emirates, uses the **Oxford 3000** with his students. Here is an extract from Bjorn's blogpost, 'Who is the **Oxford 3000** actually for?'

Introducing the Oxford 3000 to your students

"**When I started using the Oxford 3000 with my students three years ago, I wasn't sure how students would respond to these activities. I found that they seem to like the routine and recognise the value of working with the Oxford 3000 word list.**" – *Bjorn Candel*

Focus tool

The **Oxford 3000** is a perfect tool for focusing students on studying vocabulary.

A huge amount of research and work has gone into compiling this list of vital words for learners of English, and students can take advantage of this by checking if new words they come across in a text or a language activity are on the list.

I give each of my students the **Oxford 3000** in a spreadsheet, with empty columns for definitions, example sentences, word family information, collocations etc.

If a new word is on the list, I tell the students to learn it. If not, they have to decide if they feel that word is important enough to make the effort to learn it.

READ BJORN'S COMPLETE BLOGPOST ON THIS SUBJECT at **www.oupeltglobalblog.com**. You will find out how to:

- create a practical, usable version of the **Oxford 3000**
- use the list in different ways to teach and practise different elements of vocabulary
- use a grading system to build students' vocabulary portfolios

Did you know?

Over **40%** of the teachers who use the **Oxford 3000** told us they do so because they like the convenience of having a ready-made list of words.
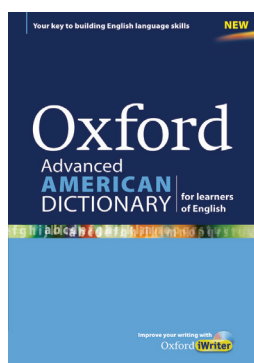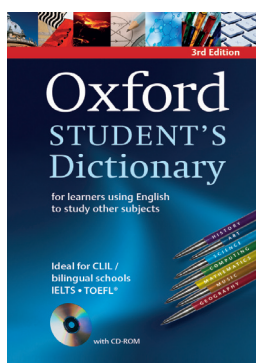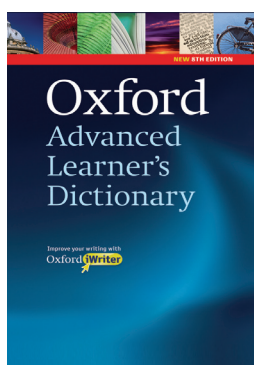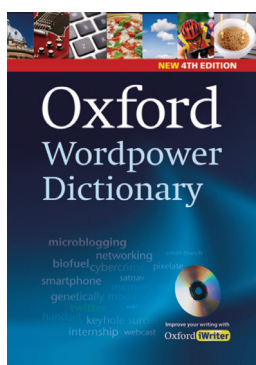
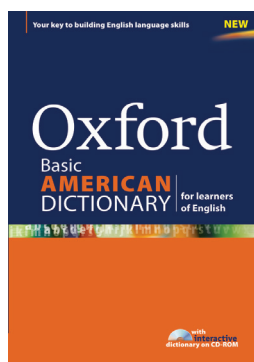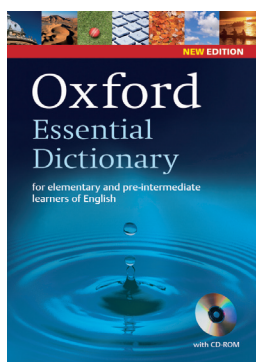| Word/Phrase	CEFR	AWL	Definition	Example Sentence	Collocations & Word Family	Date
add (v.)						
addition (n.)						
additional (adj.)						
address (n.), (v.)						
adequate (adj.)		4				
adequately (adv.)		4				
adjust (v.)		5				
admiration (n.)						
admire (v.)						
admit (v.)						
adopt (v.)						
adult (n.), (adj.)		7				
advance (n.), (v.)						
advanced (adj.)						
advantage (n.)						
adventure (n.)						
advertise (v.)						
advertisement (also ad, advert) (n.)						
advertising (n.)						

Beyond the **Oxford 3000**™

The **Oxford 3000** is used in:

The Oxford 3000 is also used in most Oxford learners' bilingual dictionaries.

The **Oxford 2000** is used in:

Beyond the Oxford 3000

Our view is that once students have a solid understanding of the key meanings of the **Oxford 3000** and have built a core vocabulary around that list, it is time for them to specialize. They are more likely to make larger gains by learning the vocabulary that suits their specific needs and purposes, which means moving on to specialist wordlists.

Our list acknowledges this. We recognize that, realistically, we can guide their vocabulary only so far. We cannot predict what learners' specific needs will be.

The **Oxford 3000** provides the most useful, important words to learn first. It offers opportunities to expand vocabulary – and it knows when to stop.

Did you know?

Research suggests that advanced learners need to know around 7500 word families (Paul Nation and Robert Waring, 'Vocabulary Size, Text Coverage and Wordlists', **www.fltr.ucl.ac.be/fltr/germ/etan/bibs/vocab/cup.html**

Use the **Oxford 3000 Text Checker** to assess texts you want to use with your students

www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/oxford_3000_profiler

The text in the box (from Patrick White's introduction on page 2 of this brochure) has a few words highlighted in red. The text has been run through the **Oxford 3000 Text Checker** and the words in red are not in the **Oxford 3000**. All of the other words are included.

> Words are a source of endless fascination. Ask a hundred people what their favourite word is, or which words irritate them the most, and you'll get a hundred different answers and some very strong opinions. Ask them which words they believe a learner needs to know and you'll soon feel confused and overwhelmed by the diversity of the answers.
>
> As language teachers, we are naturally curious about words that we encounter for the first time, and the way words change their meaning. We like finding opportunities to use words and expressions we have recently learned.

This is a useful approach for analysing texts and their vocabulary levels for your teaching activities and the good news is you don't have to do it manually. We've created an extra resource. It's called the **Oxford 3000 Text Checker** and it's available free online for you to use.

The **Text Checker** is a convenient way of checking the ease or difficulty of the vocabulary in a text. All you need to do is paste your text into the **Text Checker** online.

Analysing a text using the **Text Checker** gives you an immediate sense of how much of the text you can understand if you know the **Oxford 3000** words. It also gives you a guide as to how easy or difficult the vocabulary in a text is. A large proportion of red words indicates that the text is more difficult or uses specialist vocabulary.

'Oxford 3000 Text Checker … can prove an invaluable resource in deciding whether a text is well-suited for a particular class.' *ESLWeb.org*

www.eslweb.org/resources/index.php?topic=2043.0

Find out more about Text Checker at **www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/oxford_3000_profiler**

Introducing the Learn the **Oxford 3000** app*

As well as having the full list of words and meanings easily accessible on their phones and tablets, students can use the **Learn the Oxford 3000 app** to test themselves and measure their progress.

3 reasons to recommend **Learn the Oxford 3000** to your students:

1 Test yourself on the meaning, usage, spelling and pronunciation of the 3000 most important words to know in English

2 Practise using the interactive exercises, including multiple choice, drag-and-drop, and text entry

3 Check what the **Oxford 3000** words mean using the mini-dictionary

See **www.oup.com/elt/fingertips**
*Available for iPad and iPhone.

The **Oxford 3000**: the most important words you need to know to succeed in English

The **Oxford 3000** wordlist:

- is corpus-based
- has been created by language experts and teachers
- is based on frequency, range and familiarity
- allows students to understand up to 80–85% of words in general English texts
- is used as the defining vocabulary to explain the meaning of words in Oxford learners' dictionaries
- expands vocabulary to 7500 (when using the keyword entries in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*)
- can now be learnt with a new app

FREE ONLINE
- **Oxford 3000** Text Checker
- **Oxford 3000** wordlist, with pronunciation and dictionary look-up

Did you know?

These are just two of our coursebooks that incorporate the **Oxford 3000** into vocabulary building. Ask your Oxford representative for more information on other coursebooks that use the **Oxford 3000**.

vocabulary

familiarity experts frequency

range expand