

Making the most of the *Mini-dictionary*

1 *Build up students' confidence with monolingual dictionaries*

Some students may never have used a monolingual dictionary before. *Cutting Edge Intermediate Mini-dictionary* is designed to help students make the transition from bilingual to monolingual dictionaries. The explanations are graded to intermediate level, and the dictionary focuses on the meanings of words as they are used in the *Students' Book*, so students should have little difficulty in finding the information they are looking for. (See the introduction to the *Mini-dictionary* for a detailed explanation of which words and phrases have been included.) If students lack confidence, the following ideas may help:

- discuss with them the value of using a monolingual dictionary. Point out that they will avoid misleading translations, that it may help them to 'think in English', and that they will be increasing their exposure to English.
- look up words together at first, reading out and discussing the explanations as a class. Use the *Mini-dictionary* 'little and often' for limited but varied tasks (for example, for finding the word stress or dependent preposition of a new item of vocabulary).
- encourage students to use the *Mini-dictionary* in pairs and groups as well as individually so that they can help each other to understand the explanations and examples. Circulate, making sure that they understand definitions.

2 *Explain the different features of the Mini-dictionary*

Many students do not realise how much information they can find in a dictionary, so point out all the features given, such as parts of speech, phonemic script, irregular verb forms, etc. *Learner-training worksheet 2* and *3* on pages 106–108 of the *Resource bank* introduces students to these areas.

3 *Discourage over-use of the Mini-dictionary*

There are many other important strategies for improving vocabulary as well as dictionary skills, such as guessing meaning from context, sharing information with other students and listening to the teacher. Encourage your students to use a balance of approaches. Discourage over-use of the *Mini-dictionary* during reading activities, by focusing students' attention initially on 'key' words in the text, rather than 'anything they don't understand'. If students are really keen to look up other words, you can allow time for this at the end.

4 *Vary your approach*

If you always use the *Mini-dictionary* in the same way, students may get tired of it before long. Try using the *Mini-dictionary* in the following ways instead for a change:

- Matching words to definitions on a handout:** make a worksheet with the new words in column A and their definitions from the *Mini-dictionary* mixed up in column B. Students match the words with the definitions.
- Matching words to definitions on cards:** the same idea can be used giving each group two small sets of cards with definitions and words to match.
- I know it/I can guess it/I need to check it:** write the list of new words on the board, and tell students to copy it down marking the words xx if they already know it, x if they can guess what it means (either from context, or because it is similar in their own language) and ? if they need to look it up. They then compare answers in pairs to see if they can help each other, before looking up any words that neither of them know.
- Student–student teaching:** write out (either on the board or on a handout) the list of words you want to introduce, and allocate one to each student. Tell students to look up the word and find the meaning, the pronunciation and a good example of how it is used to help other students to understand it. Circulate, helping individuals, particularly with pronunciation problems. Students then mingle and find out the meaning and pronunciation of other words on the list they did not know. Go through any problems/questions at the end.
- Look up the five words you most need to know:** instead of pre-teaching the vocabulary in a reading text, set the first (gist-type) comprehension activity straightaway, instructing students not to refer to their *Mini-dictionary* at this point. Check answers or establish that students cannot answer without some work on vocabulary. Tell them that they are only allowed to look up five words from the text – they have to choose the five that are most important to understanding the text. Demonstrate the difference between a 'key' unknown word in the text and one that can easily be ignored. Put students in pairs to select their five words, emphasising that they must not start using their *Mini-dictionary* until they have completed their list of five. After they have finished, compare the lists of words that different pairs chose and discuss how important they are to the text, before continuing with more detailed comprehension work.
- True/False statements based on information in the Mini-dictionary:** write a list of statements about the target words on the board, then ask students to look them up to see if they are true or false, for example:
The phrase ... is very informal – true or false?
... means ... – true or false?