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The New Oxford Thesaurus of English

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Introduction

The *New Oxford Thesaurus of English (NOTE)* has been compiled using new evidence in new ways, in order to create an original work of reference that will be most useful to a wide range of users for many different purposes. It is an independent work of reference in its own right, but may also be viewed as a companion volume to the *New Oxford Dictionary of English (NODE)*. Where *NODE* presented a new, more accurate picture of the language than had previously been possible, *NOTE* elaborates the theme, with lists of words grouped together according to their similarity in meaning and checked against the evidence for actual usage, as found in the British National Corpus and the database of the Oxford Reading Programme. It is an essential companion for anyone who wants to expand their vocabulary and improve their creative writing skills, and for aficionados of word games.

The word *thesaurus* comes from a Greek word meaning 'treasure house'. All thesauruses contain lists of words that are linked by having a similar meaning, but this thesaurus goes much further: it also contains antonyms (words with opposite meanings), related terms, noun lists, detailed studies of closely related synonyms, advice on confusable words, and other features. A common everyday use for a thesaurus is as an aid in solving crossword puzzles, and such users will find that the coverage in this book is fuller and more focused than most. But this is by no means the only function of an alphabetical thesaurus. Some people will use this book to look up a familiar word, in order to find a less familiar word which may be on the tip of their tongue. Others will use it for guidance in choosing *le mot juste*, to help improve the communicative power and accuracy of their writing, in an essay or report for example. Whatever the purpose, the reader can be assured of finding a rich and varied selection of words with similar meaning, a selection that has been systematically enhanced by computerized checking and cross-checking.

Selection of entries

The primary purpose of *NOTE* is to give lists of synonyms for the common everyday words of English: words with roughly the same meaning as the entry word or 'headword'. Not every word has synonyms. Some words, especially terms denoting kinds of animals, plants, and physical objects, have no synonyms, so they do not get entries in a thesaurus. The reader will look in vain for synonyms of *gerbil* and *geranium*. There is an entry for *squirrel*, but it is not there for the noun denoting the animal, which has no synonym. The entry is there in order to give synonyms for the phrasal verb *squirrel something away*, and as a reference point for a table of different kinds of squirrels and related rodents.

The words selected as entries are general words that non-specialists are likely to want to look up. It is the job of a dictionary, not a thesaurus, to explain the meanings of unusual words, such as *supererogatory*, so such words do not get an alphabetical entry here. However, *supererogatory* is given as a synonym at entries for the more familiar words *inessential*, *needless*, and *unnecessary*. A thesaurus can thus lead

the user from the familiar to the unfamiliar, improving his or her word power.

Tables

A special feature of *NOTE* is its 480 tables, which are included throughout the book to give additional information relevant to particular headwords. They range from lists of different breeds or kinds of animals, birds, and plants to lists of famous artists, architects, and scientists. For example, at the entry for *actor/actress* there is a selection of synonyms for the words themselves, together with a comprehensive list of well-known actors and actresses of both stage and screen.

Certain headwords are included despite the fact that they have no synonyms, in order to direct the reader to a table. For example, at the entry for *volcano* the reader will find no synonyms but instead a pointer to a list of major volcanoes, together with their location and the date of their most recent eruption. Tables covering the essential vocabulary of such fields as art, economics, computing, and cricket are also included. The provision of these tables makes *NOTE* an invaluable aid to crossword-solving and a fascinating source of encyclopedic information on subjects as diverse as marsupials and military leaders.

Homonyms

Homonyms are words that are written the same but which have completely different and unrelated meanings. For example, the *bark* of a dog is a completely different word from the *bark* of a tree. There are three different words spelled *bay*, and four spelled *sound*. Some words that are written with the same spelling are pronounced differently. In such cases, a note on pronunciation is given, either by giving a word that rhymes with the headword, e.g.

wind¹ (rhymes with 'tinned') ► noun

wind² (rhymes with 'mind') ► verb

or by stating where the stress falls, e.g.

defect¹ (stress on first syllable) ► noun

defect² (stress on second syllable) ► verb

Synonyms

It is sometimes argued that no two words have exactly the same meaning. Even words as similar in meaning as *close* and *shut* may have slightly different nuances. *Closing* a shop implies that the shop is no longer open for business, so no one can come in. On the other hand, *shutting* a shop implies that the shop is being made secure, so nothing can be taken out. A similar distinction is found between *strong* and *powerful*: *powerful enemies* may threaten from outside, but a *strong*

defence on the inside will deter them from attacking. However, these are unusually subtle distinctions. For most practical purposes, *close* and *shut* have the same meaning, as do *strong* and *powerful*. Other synonyms are more distant, or emphasize different aspects of the meaning. For example, another close synonym of *strong* is *muscular*, but it places much more emphasis on physical strength. By contrast, *stalwart* and *staunch* are synonyms that emphasize more abstract aspects of this meaning of *strong*. *Forceful*, *secure*, *durable*, *loud*, *intense*, *bright*, and *alcoholic* are other close synonyms of *strong*, but all in quite different senses. They are not, of course, synonyms of each other.

In this book, the broadest possible definition of the term 'synonym' has been adopted, as being the one that will be most useful to users. Even words whose meaning is quite distantly related to that of the headword are listed if they can be used to get the same message across in appropriate contexts. Synonyms are not restricted to single words, and some expressions can be quite colourful: for example, the synonyms for *tinker* include not only *fiddle* (*with*) and *try to mend*, but also *rearrange the deckchairs on the Titanic*.

The synonyms in each entry are grouped together in synonym sets. Major synonym sets correspond roughly to different senses of a word in a dictionary. Each major synonym set is numbered, and many have more delicate subdivisions, which are separated by semicolons.

At the start of almost every synonym set is a 'core synonym': the term which is closest in meaning to the headword in that particular sense. Core synonyms are printed in **BOLD SMALL CAPITALS**. Only a very few words have no core synonym. Some synonym sets have more than one core synonym; for example at *avant-garde* (adjective), both *innovative* and *advanced* are very close in meaning to the headword, so both are given as core synonyms. Two different core synonyms within the same sense group may emphasize slightly different aspects of the meaning of the headword. For example, at *dutiful*, the first core synonym given is *conscientious*, followed by a group of words closely related to this aspect of its meaning. Then, after a semicolon, a second core synonym, *obedient*, is given, with a further group of synonyms grouped around that aspect of the meaning.

Synonyms whose usage is restricted in some way, for example regionalisms or very formal or informal words, are placed at the end of each major synonym set and labelled accordingly. See **Register** below.

Illustrative examples

Almost every synonym set in *NOTE* is illustrated with a carefully chosen example of the word in use in the relevant sense. These are authentic examples of natural usage taken from the British National Corpus and the files of the Oxford Reading Programme (see **Linguistic evidence** below). They have occasionally been lightly edited to make the sense more apparent or to eliminate digressions. The examples can therefore be trusted for guidance on using unfamiliar words in an idiomatic way.

Where part of an example is printed in *bold italic* type, this indicates that some or all of the synonyms can be substituted for that particular phrase, not just for the headword alone. Thus at *attached*, the example given is:

she was very **attached to** her brother.

In this case the synonyms are all equivalent to *attached to*:

FOND OF, devoted to, full of regard for, full of admiration for; affectionate towards, tender towards, caring towards; *informal* mad about, crazy about, nuts about.

In the entry for *impute*, the example given is:

he **imputes** selfish views **to** me.

This is followed by the synonym set:

ATTRIBUTE, ascribe, assign, credit, accredit, chalk up; connect with, associate with, lay on, lay at the door of; *informal* pin on, stick on.

The synonyms up to the first semicolon are synonyms for *impute*, and those after it are synonyms for *impute to*.

Linguistic evidence

The compilers of *NOTE* have had access to two major linguistic resources, the British National Corpus and the files of the Oxford Reading Programme. The British National Corpus is a body of 100 million words of English books, newspapers, and transcribed speech in machine-readable form, used for linguistic and lexicographical research. The Oxford Reading Programme is a database of citations collected by Oxford's international network of readers, currently amounting to over 60 million words and increasing by about 7 million words every year.

In both these resources, the context of every occurrence of a given word can be viewed in a few seconds, making it possible to see more clearly than ever before how words are actually used. This method was used not only to confirm whether a word has senses for which there are suitable synonyms and to check the sense of words being selected as synonyms but also to actively find synonyms which have not previously been recorded. The British National Corpus, in particular, was also used to obtain the sentences and phrases given as examples of usage.

Phrasal verbs and idiomatic phrases

English is full of idiomatic expressions—phrases whose meaning is more than the sum of their parts. For example, *a shot in the dark* means 'a guess', while *a shot in the arm* means 'a boost'. Neither of these meanings has very much to do with more literal meanings of *shot*. In this thesaurus, particular care has been given to make a full selection of idiomatic expressions and to give synonyms for them. If a word is used as both a noun and a verb, the idiomatic expressions are listed as subentries under the part of speech in which the word is used. Thus *by the book* is given under the noun senses of *book*, while *book in* is given under the verb senses.

Full coverage is also given to phrasal verbs in this thesaurus. Phrasal verbs are expressions such as *book in* and *turn out*, consisting of a verb plus a particle. The meaning of a phrasal verb is often very different from that of the basic verb; for example, the meanings of *take off* are quite distinct from the meanings of *take*. Phrasal verbs are listed as idiomatic expressions under the main verb entry.

Register: standard vs informal and regional English

Informal usage is more prevalent than it was a few years ago. Even in quite formal contexts, people may be heard using slang expressions, while the use of swear words and taboo words is on the increase. Taboos generally are weakening, though more so in Australia, where *bastard* is almost equivalent to British *chap*, and less so in the USA, where taboos are still strong in southern States such as Texas. This thesaurus contains a rich selection of informal and rude synonyms for more formal expressions. Users who wish to avoid offensive words may treat the restrictive labels as warning notices.

Most of the synonyms given are, of course, part of standard English; that is, they are in normal use in both speech and writing everywhere in the world, at many different levels of formality, ranging from official documents to casual conversation. These general synonyms are given first in each synonym set. Some words, however, are appropriate only in particular contexts, and these are placed after the standard expressions and labelled accordingly. The technical term for these differences in levels of usage is 'register'. The main register labels used in this thesaurus are the following:

informal: normally only used in contexts such as conversations or letters between friends, e.g. *swig* as a synonym for *drink*.

vulgar slang: informal language that may cause offence, usually because it refers to bodily functions.

formal: normally only used in writing, in contexts such as official documents, e.g. *dwelling* as a synonym for *home*.

technical: normally only used in technical and specialist language, though not necessarily restricted to any specific field, e.g. *littoral* as a synonym for *beach*. Words used in specific fields are given appropriate labels, e.g. *medicine*, *Christianity*.

poetic/literary: found only or mainly in poetry or in literature written in an 'elevated' style, e.g. *ambrosial* as a synonym for *delicious*.

dated: still used, but normally only by the older generation, e.g. *measure one's length* as a synonym for *fall down*.

historical: still used today, but only to refer to some practice or article that is no longer part of the modern world, e.g. *crinoline* as a synonym for *petticoat*.

humorous: used with the intention of sounding funny or playful, e.g. *terminological inexactitude* as a synonym for *lie*.

archaic: very old-fashioned language, not in ordinary use at all today, but sometimes used to give a deliberately old-fashioned effect or found in works of the past that are still widely read, e.g. *aliment* as a synonym for *food*.

rare: not in common use, e.g. *acclivitous* as a synonym for *steep*.

World English

It is an oft-repeated truism that English is now a world language. In this thesaurus, particular care has been taken to include synonyms from every variety of English, not just British, and when these are exclusively or very strongly associated with a region of the world they are labelled as such.

The main regional standards are British (abbreviated to *Brit.*), North American (*N. Amer.*), Australian and New Zealand (*Austral./NZ*), South African (*S. African*), Indian (in the sense of the variety of English found throughout the subcontinent), and West Indian (*W. Indian*). Only if the distinction is very clear is any finer labelling used, as with *beer parlour*, a Canadian synonym for *bar*.

Scottish, Irish, and Northern English are varieties within the British Isles containing distinctive vocabulary items of their own. The main synonyms found as regional terms of this kind are listed here and labelled accordingly.

The term for something found mainly or only in a particular country or region (although it may be mentioned in any variety of English) is identified by an indication such as '(in France)'. An example is *gîte* (as a synonym for *cottage*).

Many regionally restricted terms are informal, rather than being part of the standard language. Writers in the northern hemisphere in search of local colour may be delighted to learn that an Australian synonym for *sordid* is *scungy*, while Australian writers may find it equally useful to be given the equivalent terms in Britain, *manky* and *grotty*.

Opposites

Many synonym sets are followed by one or more words that have the opposite meaning from the headword, often called 'antonyms'. There are several different kinds of antonym. *True* and *false* are absolute antonyms, with no middle ground. Logically, a statement is either true or false, but cannot be slightly true or rather false. *Hot* and *cold*, on the other hand, are antonyms with gradations of meaning: it makes per-

fectly good sense to say that something is rather hot or very cold, and there are a number of words (*warm*, *tepid*, *cool*) which represent intermediate stages. It makes sense to ask about something "How hot is it?" but that commits the speaker to the notion that it is hot at least to some extent. So *hot* and *cold* are at opposite ends of a continuum, rather than being absolutes.

For many words, there is no single word that counts as an antonym, but there may be a phrase that gets the opposite meaning across. For example, what is the opposite of *senile*? There is no exact antonym, but the phrase *in the prime of life* gets the opposite meaning across. In this book the broadest possible definition has been adopted, giving the maximum amount of information to the user. In some cases, a phrasal antonym is given for a phrasal subentry, e.g. *bottle things up* as an antonym for *let off steam*.

The antonyms given in this book are not the only possible opposites, but they are usually the furthest in meaning from the headword. By looking up the 'opposite' word as an entry in its own right, the user will generally find a much larger range of antonyms to choose from. For example, at the entry for *delete* the user will find:

OPPOSITES: add, insert.

Both *add* and *insert* are entries in their own right.

Related terms

A special feature of *NOTE* is that it gives not only synonyms and opposites but also other related terms, especially for concrete nouns such as *milk* (where *lactic* is not a synonym, but a word with a related meaning) and *town* (*municipal*, *urban*, and *oppidan*). There are two types of related words: the first are adjectives which usually mean 'relating to' the headword but have a different origin (e.g. *lactic* for *milk*) and which may therefore not spring to mind as quickly as a straightforward derivative such as *milky*. The second type is typically a word very closely associated with the headword, but with a different meaning. For example, a related word may denote a part of the thing denoted by the headword, or it may denote a particular form of this thing. Thus, at *barrel*, the related words given are *cooper*, *stave*, and *hoop*—a maker of barrels, and two important components of a barrel.

Combining forms

Combining forms are given after related terms. These are very similar to the first kind of related terms, but in the form of a prefix or suffix that is used in combination with other elements, e.g. *oeno-* with the sense 'wine', as in *oenology*, or *-vorous* with the sense 'eat', as in *carnivorous*.

Awkward synonyms and confusables

One thing a plain list of synonyms cannot do is help the reader choose between them by describing their nuances and connotations. For instance, the words *blunt*, *candid*, *forthright*, *frank*, and *outspoken* are all given as synonyms of each other, because they all have roughly the same meaning. But there are subtle differences. This set (at *candid*) comprises one of the 120 studies of 'Awkward Synonyms' in *NOTE*, devoted to explaining the differences in meaning between close synonyms. The distinctions are based on careful analysis of actual usage as recorded in the British National Corpus, and examples of typical usage are given, selected from the British National Corpus and the citation collection of the Oxford Reading Programme.

The other type of article printed as a boxed feature, 'Confusables', compares words which may cause difficulty for the opposite reason to 'awkward synonyms': they are usually similar in form, as are *militate* and *mitigate*, and sometimes even pronounced the same, as are *principal* and *principle*, but are very different in meaning.

How to use this thesaurus

headword	ancillary ▶ adjective ancillary staff ancillary benefits; ADDITIONAL ; auxiliary, supporting, helping, assisting, extra, supplementary, supplemental, accessory, contributory, attendant; subsidiary, secondary, subordinate; <i>medicine</i> : adjunct; <i>rare</i> adminicular. — COMBINING FORM : para-	core synonym
semicolon marking subdivision of synonym set		label indicating specialist field in which following synonym is used
part of speech of headword	book ▶ noun: ❶ he published his first book in 1610; VOLUME , tome, work, printed work, publication, title, opus, treatise; novel, storybook; manual, handbook, guide, companion, reference book; paperback, hardback, softback; <i>historical</i> yellowback; <i>See</i> tables of LITERATURE , NOVEL . — COMBINING FORM : biblio-	example of use
prefix with the sense of the headword	❷ he scribbled a few notes in his book NOTEPAD , notebook, pad, memo pad, exercise book, binder; ledger, record book, log, logbook, chronicle, journal, diary, daybook; <i>Brit.</i> jotter, pocketbook; <i>N. Amer.</i> scratch pad; <i>French</i> : cahier. ❸ (books): the council had to balance its books ACCOUNTS , records, archives; account book , record book, ledger, log, balance sheet, financial statement.	cross-reference to lists of words for different types of book
form of the headword for which synonyms are given	■ by the book : he does all his police work by the book ACCORDING TO THE RULES , in accordance with the rules, within the law, abiding by the law, lawfully, legally, legitimately, licitly; honestly, fairly, openly; <i>informal</i> : on the level, on the up and up, fair and square.	label indicating origin of following synonym
noun phrase entered under noun section	▶ verb : ❶ Steven booked a table at their favourite restaurant RESERVE , make a reservation for, arrange in advance, prearrange, arrange for, order; charter, hire; <i>informal</i> bag; <i>dated</i> : engage, bespeak. ❷ we booked a number of events in the Wellington Festival ARRANGE , programme, schedule, timetable, line up, secure, fix up, lay on; <i>N. Amer.</i> slate.	label indicating informality of following synonyms
number for each sense treated separately	▶ book in : he booked in at the St Francis Hotel REGISTER , check in, enrol, record/log one's arrival.	label indicating currency of following synonyms
phrasal verb entered under verb section		
pronunciation	lead (rhymes with 'bed'): ▶ noun ❶ a lead-lined box. — RELATED TERMS : plumbic, plumbous. — COMBINING FORM : plumb-. ❷ he was removing the lead from the man's chest BULLET , pellet, ball, slug; shot, buckshot, ammunition.	adjectives or other words related to the headword
words meaning the opposite of the headword	peculiar ▶ adjective ❶ something even more peculiar began to happen STRANGE , unusual, odd, funny, curious, bizarre, weird, uncanny, queer, unexpected, unfamiliar, abnormal, atypical, anomalous, untypical, different, out of the ordinary, out of the way; exceptional, rare, extraordinary, remarkable; puzzling, mystifying, mysterious, perplexing, baffling, unaccountable, incongruous, uncommon, irregular, singular, deviant, aberrant, freak, freakish; suspicious, dubious, questionable; eerie, unnatural; <i>Scottish</i> unco; <i>French</i> outré; <i>informal</i> fishy, creepy, spooky; <i>Brit. informal</i> rum; <i>See</i> AWKWARD SYNONYMS at STRANGE . — OPPOSITES : normal, ordinary. ❷ his peculiar behaviour at the airport BIZARRE , eccentric, strange, odd, weird, queer, funny, unusual, abnormal, idiosyncratic, unconventional, outlandish, offbeat, freakish, quirky, quaint, droll, zany, off-centre; <i>informal</i> wacky, freaky, kooky, screwy, kinky, oddball, cranky; <i>N. Amer. informal</i> off the wall, wacko; <i>Austral./NZ informal, dated</i> dilly.	cross-reference to article that helps with choice of strange, odd, curious, or peculiar
label indicating that this sense of peculiar is used in informal language	❸ (<i>informal</i>): I still feel a bit peculiar UNWELL , ill, poorly, bad, out of sorts, indisposed, not oneself, sick, queasy, nauseous, nauseated, peaky, liverish, green about the gills, run down, washed out; <i>Brit.</i> off, off colour; <i>informal</i> under the weather, below par, not up to par, funny, rough, lousy, rotten, awful, terrible, dreadful, crummy, seedy; <i>Brit. informal</i> grotty, ropy; <i>Scottish informal</i> : wabbit, peely-wally; <i>Austral./NZ informal</i> crook; <i>rare</i> peaked, peakish.	label indicating regional use of following synonyms
phrase for which synonyms are given	❹ attitudes and mannerisms: peculiar to: the islanders CHARACTERISTIC OF , typical of, representative of, belonging to, indicative of, symptomatic of, suggestive of, exclusive to, like, in character with. ❺ Elena added her own peculiar contribution DISTINCTIVE , characteristic, distinct, different, individual, individualistic, distinguishing, typical, special, specific, representative, unique, idiosyncratic, personal, private, essential, natural, identifiable, unmistakable, conspicuous, notable, remarkable; <i>rare</i> singular.	

lordly, assertive, dogmatic, peremptory, arrogant, dominating, domineering, imperious, overbearing, bossy, authoritarian.
- OPPOSITES: timid, diffident.

authority ▶ noun ① he had absolute authority over his subordinates | a rebellion against those in authority POWER, jurisdiction, command, control, mastery, charge, dominance, dominion, rule, sovereignty, ascendancy, supremacy, domination; influence, sway, the upper hand, leverage, hold, grip; informal clout, pull, muscle, teeth; N. Amer. informal drag.

② military forces have the legal authority to arrest drug traffickers AUTHORIZATION, right, power, mandate, prerogative, licence; French carte blanche; law, historical droit.

③ the money was spent without parliamentary authority AUTHORIZATION, permission, consent, leave, sanction, licence, dispensation, assent, acquiescence, agreement, approval, seal of approval, approbation, endorsement, imprimatur, clearance; informal the go-ahead, the thumbs up, the OK, the green light, say-so; rare permit.

④ (authorities) the plight of the refugees was acknowledged by the authorities OFFICIALS, officialdom, the people in charge, the government, the administration, the establishment, the bureaucracy, the system; the police; informal the powers that be, the (men in) suits, Big Brother.

⑤ he was an authority on the stock market EXPERT, specialist, professional, pundit, oracle, past master, maestro, doyen, adept; guru, sage, scholar; connoisseur, aficionado, one of the cognoscenti; informal walking encyclopedia, bible, buff, boffin, ace, pro, whizz, wizard; Brit. informal dab hand; N. Amer. informal maven, crackerjack.

⑥ the court cited a series of authorities supporting their decision SOURCE, reference, piece of documentation; citation, quotation, quote, excerpt, passage.

⑦ I have it on good authority that you were there EVIDENCE, testimony, witness, attestation, sworn statement, declaration, word, avowal, deposition, profession.

authorization ▶ noun they will require authorization from the Law Society or another regulator PERMISSION, consent, leave, sanction, licence, dispensation, warrant, clearance; assent, acquiescence, agreement, approval, seal of approval, approbation, endorsement, blessing, imprimatur, acceptance, rubber stamp, accreditation; authority, right, power, mandate; Latin nihil obstat; informal the go-ahead, the thumbs up, the OK, the green light, the nod, say-so; rare permit. See AWKWARD SYNONYMS at PERMISSION.

- OPPOSITES: refusal, prohibition.

authorize ▶ verb ① the government authorized further aircraft production GIVE PERMISSION FOR, permit, sanction, allow, agree to, approve, give one's consent/assent to, consent to, assent to, accede to, countenance; license, legalize, make legal, legitimize, legitimize; ratify, endorse, validate, accredit, warrant; informal give the green light to, give the go-ahead for, give the OK to, OK, give the thumbs up to; N. Amer. rare approve.

- OPPOSITES: forbid, veto.

② the Commander-in-Chief authorized him to recruit a further six officers GIVE SOMEONE THE AUTHORITY, give someone permission, mandate, commission, empower; entitle.

authorized ▶ adjective authorized financial institutions | an authorized biography APPROVED, recognized, sanctioned, commissioned; accredited, licensed, certified, warranted; official, lawful, legal, legitimate, licit.

- OPPOSITE: unofficial.

autobiography ▶ noun MEMOIRS, life story, account of one's life, personal history; diary, journal.

autocracy ▶ noun ABSOLUTISM, absolute power, totalitarianism, dictatorship, despotism, tyranny, monocracy, autarchy; dystopia.

- OPPOSITE: democracy.

autocrat ▶ noun ABSOLUTE RULER, dictator, despot, tyrant, monocrat; authoritarian, absolutist.

autocratic ▶ adjective an autocratic government | her autocratic management style DESPOTIC, tyrannical, oppressive, repressive; DICTATORIAL, totalitarian, autarchic, absolute, all-powerful, arbitrary; undemocratic, one-party, monocratic; illiberal, domineering, doctrinaire, dogmatic, draconian, overweening, overbearing, bossy, high-handed, peremptory, imperious, harsh, strict, severe, rigid, inflexible, unyielding; dystopian.

- OPPOSITES: democratic, liberal.

autograph ▶ noun fans pestered him for his autograph SIGNATURE; informal moniker; N. Amer. informal John Hancock.

▶ verb Jack autographed copies of his book SIGN, write one's signature on, sign one's name on.

automatic ▶ adjective ① automatic garage doors MECHANIZED, mechanical, automated, push-button, pre-programmed, computerized, electronic, robotic, unmanned; self-activating, self-regulating, self-directing, self-executing.

- OPPOSITES: manual, hand-operated.

② an automatic reaction INSTINCTIVE, involuntary, unconscious, reflex, knee-jerk, reflexive, instinctual, subconscious, unconditioned; SPONTAN-

AWKWARD SYNONYMS autocratic; despotic; tyrannical

These words are all more or less critical descriptions of someone's exercise of power.

■ **Autocratic** denotes a regime where all power is concentrated in the hands of a single ruler: *autocratic, serf-ridden tsarist Russia*. It has come to be used of anyone in a position of power who refuses to share that power with others: *an autocratic management style*. Generally, *autocratic* implies no comment on the benevolence or otherwise of the exercise of power; if there is criticism, it is only of the exclusiveness.

■ **Despotic** is a less common word. Derived from the Greek term for a master or absolute ruler, it now usually describes someone who not only holds great power but exercises it oppressively: *the cruel, corrupt, and despotic Shah*.

■ **Tyrannical** too derives from a Greek term that originally simply denoted an absolute ruler; but it now invariably refers to cruel exercise of power by someone who cannot be called to account: *he had been devastated by the oppression or the tyrannical landowner*.

eous, impulsive, unthinking, unpremeditated, unintentional, unintended, unbidden, unwitting, inadvertent; mechanical; habitual; informal gut.

- OPPOSITES: conscious, intentional, deliberate.

③ he is the automatic choice for the senior team INEVITABLE, unavoidable, inescapable, necessary, ineluctable; certain, definite, undoubted, assured, obvious; mandatory, compulsory.

autonomous ▶ adjective an autonomous republic SELF-GOVERNING, INDEPENDENT, sovereign, free, self-ruling, self-determining, autarchic; self-sufficient.

autonomy ▶ noun Tatarstan demanded greater autonomy within the Russian Federation SELF-GOVERNMENT, INDEPENDENCE, self-rule, home rule, sovereignty, self-determination, freedom, autarchy; self-sufficiency, individualism.

autopsy ▶ noun POST-MORTEM, PM, necropsy.

auxiliary ▶ adjective ① an auxiliary power source ADDITIONAL, supplementary, supplemental, extra, reserve, back-up, emergency, fallback, spare, substitute, other; subsidiary, accessory, adjunct.

② auxiliary nursing staff ANCILLARY, assistant, support, supporting, helping, assisting, aiding.

- COMBINING FORM: para-

▶ noun a nursing auxiliary ASSISTANT, helper, aide.

avail ▶ verb ① guests paying by credit card can avail themselves of the express check-out service USE, make use of, take advantage of, utilize, employ; resort to, have recourse to, turn to, look to.

② even if his arguments are correct, that cannot avail him in this case HELP, aid, assist, benefit, be of use to, be useful to, profit, be of advantage to, be of service to.

▶ noun ■ to no avail he searched in several bookshops, but to no avail IN VAIN, without success, unsuccessfully, vainly, with no result, fruitlessly, to no purpose; for nothing; archaic bootlessly. - OPPOSITE: successfully.

available ▶ adjective ① refreshments will be available all afternoon | a few places are still available OBTAINABLE, accessible, to be had, ready for use, at hand, to hand, at one's disposal, at one's fingertips, within easy reach, handy, convenient; on sale, on the market, in stock, in season; untaken, unengaged, unused; informal up for grabs, yours for the asking, on tap, get-at-able, gettable; rare procurable.

- OPPOSITE: unavailable.

② hold the line, and I'll see if he's available FREE, unoccupied, not busy; present, in attendance; contactable.

- OPPOSITES: unavailable, busy, engaged.

avalanche ▶ noun ① SNOWSLIDE, snow-slip; rockslide, icefall; landslide, landslip.

② the publication of the book produced an avalanche of press comment BARAGE, volley; FLOOD, deluge, torrent, tide, stream, storm, shower, spate, wave.

- OPPOSITE: trickle.

avant-garde ▶ adjective her tastes were too avant-garde for her contemporaries INNOVATIVE, ADVANCED, innovative, original, experimental, inventive, ahead of the times, new, forward-looking, futuristic, modern, ultra-modern, state-of-the-art, trendsetting, pioneering, progressive, groundbreaking, trailblazing, revolutionary; unfamiliar, unorthodox, unconventional, eccentric, offbeat, bohemian; N. Amer. leftfield; informal go-ahead, way-out; rare new-fashioned, neoteric.

- OPPOSITES: conservative, reactionary.

avarice ▶ noun he had a reputation for ruthlessness and avarice GREED, acquisitiveness, cupidity, covetousness, avariciousness, rapacity, rapaciousness, graspingness, materialism, mercenariness; meanness, miserliness; informal money-grubbing, money-grabbing, an itching palm; N. Amer. informal grabbiness; rare Mammonism, pleonexia.

- OPPOSITE: generosity.

avaricious ▶ adjective GRASPING, acquisitive, covetous, greedy, rapa-

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