

GOOGLE

Pocket Guide



O'REILLY®

*Tara Calishain,,
Rael Dornfest & DJ Adams*

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Consulting the Dictionary

Google's own spellchecking (see "Checking Spelling" in Part III) is built upon its own word and phrase database gleaned while indexing web pages. Thus, it provides suggestions for lesser-known proper names, phrases, common sentence constructs, etc. Google also offers a definition service powered by Dictionary.com (<http://www.dictionary.com>). Definitions, while coming from a credible source and augmented by various specialty indexes, can be more limited.

Run a search. You'll notice on the results page the phrase "Searched the web for [query words]." If the query words appear in a dictionary, they will be hyperlinked to a dictionary definition. Identified phrases will be linked as a phrase; for example, the query "jolly roger" will allow you to look up the phrase "jolly roger." On the other hand, the phrase "computer legal" will allow you to look up the separate words "computer" and "legal."

The definition search will sometimes fail on obscure words, very new words, slang, and technical vocabularies (otherwise known as specialized slang). If you search for a word's meaning and Google can't help you, try enlisting the services of a metasearch dictionary like OneLook (<http://www.onelook.com>), which indexes over 4 million words in over 700 dictionaries. If that doesn't work, try Google again with one of the following tricks:

- If you're searching for several words—you're reading a technical manual, for example—search for several of the words at the same time. Sometimes you'll find a glossary this way. For example, maybe you're reading a book about marketing, and you don't know many of the words. If you search for storyboard stet SAU, you'll get only a few search results, and they'll all be glossaries.
- Try searching for your word and the word glossary; say, stet glossary. Be sure to use an unusual word; you may not know what a "spread" is in the context of market-

ing, but searching for spread glossary will get you over 300,000 results for many different kinds of glossaries.

- Try searching for the phrase *queryword* means or the words *What does queryword mean?*, where *queryword* is the word you want to find.
- If you're searching for a medical or a technical item, narrow your search to educational (.edu) sites. If you want a contextual definition for using equine acupuncture and how it might be used to treat laminitis, try `site:edu "equine acupuncture" laminitis`.
- `site:edu` will give you a brief list of results. Furthermore, you'll avoid book lists and online stores, which is handy if you're seeking information and don't necessarily want to purchase anything. If you're searching for slang, try narrowing your search to sites like Geocities and Tripod, and see what happens. Sometimes young people put fan sites and other informal cultural collections up on free places like Geocities, and using these you can find many examples of slang in context instead of dry lists of definitions. There is an amazing number of glossaries on Geocities; search for `glossary site:geocities.com`, and see for yourself.

Google's connection with Dictionary.com means that simple definition checking is very fast and easy. But even more obscure words can be found quickly if you apply a little creative thinking.