

found it of great benefit in accessing high-quality web resources.

Further details are available from:
<http://www.rdn.ac.uk/rdn-i/>
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New dimension to Oxford reference works

Finding answers to tricky questions in Oxford's famous reference works will soon take just seconds. In March 2002 Oxford University Press will publish its core language and subject reference dictionaries online for the first time. A two-year collaborative project between OUP Oxford and OUP New York will make 100 titles available as a subscription service to academic, corporate, and specialist libraries, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, and government offices around the world - from San Francisco to Sydney.

The service, Oxford Reference Online: the Core Collection, comprises well over one million dictionary definitions, facts, figures, people, places, sayings, and dates from a hundred of Oxford's central English and bilingual dictionaries, usage, quotation, and subject reference books all combined to create one integrated knowledge resource.

A key benefit of the service will be regular updating from Oxford's extensive programme of new references and regular new editions of works on core subjects. With around 30 new and revised works due between now and 2004 on subjects such as statistics, tourism, sport, archaeology, and business, expanding a reference collection and keeping it up to date will be quicker and simpler than ever before. It will also be more reliable. With so much unchecked information on the internet, the fact that every Oxford reference work is written by experts and extensively checked for quality before publication, will be an additional reason to 'Ask Oxford'.

The initiative to put Oxford's reference texts online has already meant the digitisation of tens of millions of words, and the complex and extensive restructuring and tagging of texts. From 'Aale-nian' in the *Dictionary of earth sciences* to 'ZZ Ceti star' in the *Dictionary of astronomy*, material equivalent to over 60,000 book pages is being turned into more than 500Mb of data.

Director of the project, David Swarbrick, says: 'ORO is the perfect complement to the Oxford

English Dictionary Online, launched eighteen months ago. Its aggregated texts offer a new global standard for reference across the internet and in the process make accessible Oxford's massive reference assets. Fact-finding may be its most obvious function but its vast range of data will also take users into genuinely new areas of knowledge, allowing them to move from one piece of information to another from 'oil' as a commodity to *Oil!* as a novel, from daydreaming in French to lucid dreaming in psychology. A search for romanticism will offer up perspectives from politics, art, mythology, and music but also include the border romances of American Southern literature. Research into 'table' will give its translation in many languages but also unearth a decision table, a sofa table, plus truth, communion, life, loo, Pembroke, and corbel tables too. And from *The Oxford dictionary of quotations*, J. Alfred Prufrock's evening that is 'spread out against the sky, like a patient etherised upon a table' (T. S. Eliot, 'The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock').

Oxford Reference Online has been designed by users for users. Multiple one-to-one and workshop sessions with librarians, academics, students, and other reference users in the UK and USA have been a key part of creating the development brief for the service. Searchability is the key to meeting users' needs. It is not just a question of what the 21st-century reference user needs (a 13 year-old finding out about astronomy, a business user checking facts, an academic checking dates) it is a question of what they would like to do, but currently cannot. ORO will offer a wide choice of search options that will mean that searching for a quick definition or for a detailed explanation of a complex term are both simple to do and fast.

'Quick search' will match any term from over one million entries, but if the term is a tricky one it will also search the complete text, to find results which could typically include a dictionary definition from the *Concise Oxford dictionary* 2001 edition or the *Oxford American dictionary*, and translations from the major European languages, etymology, synonyms, and idiomatic uses, plus its relevance to a far wider range of subjects than the enquirer may expect. If the term features in famous quotations or proverbs, these will be found too.

'Advanced search' will extend users' enquiries. For example, 'gene' will find genetics, genomics, genetic engineering, genetically, Human Genome Project and so on in ORO's 'concept search'. There is 'Boolean' (and/or/not) searching, and if you

are not sure how to spell a word, the 'Spellcheck search' will help you.

But has the much-thumbed, much-loved reference book a future? Of course! Oxford reference books will continue to be published alongside Oxford Reference Online to ensure that comprehensive, accessible reference material, prepared by leading scholars, for users throughout the English-speaking world can be provided in the form in which it is most useful to them, whether that's on paper or on screen.

The ORO website is at:

<http://www.oxfordreference.com>