

CUSTOMIZE YOUR OWN ENGLISH DICTIONARIES

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In the March issue of this journal Jarek Krajka emphasizes the importance of embedding an English dictionary in building an English-learning Website (Jarek Krajka, *Enhancing the Class Website with Additional Features (Web Statistics, Chat Room, Search Engine, Dictionary)*, *Teaching English with Technology, A Word from a Techie*, vol. 2, no. 2, March 2002, <http://www.iatefl.org.pl/call/callnl.htm>). I do agree with him and will discuss the topic from a different angle.

The Internet is changing all aspects of life and work and it also exercises impact on traditional methods of acquiring English. For centuries printed books and dictionaries have been the most important tools for non-native English speakers to learn the language, being the main source of reference when they have difficulty doing problems by themselves. Generally, they would prepare several print dictionaries on hand for consultation. All of us know the disadvantages of this method, namely low efficiency, unsatisfactory consulting results and, moreover, limited resources as we do not have dictionaries covering all fields.

As the Internet grows rapidly and tremendously, more and more online dictionary websites such as Wordsmyth and Lexical FreeNet come out and provide services 24 hours a day. More influential and traditional dictionary publishers such as Cambridge International Dictionary of English and The American Heritage Dictionary are joining in this mainstream as well. These online dictionaries greatly enrich resources on the Net and give all people, native and non-native English speakers alike, free and easy access

to them for reference through the Internet. The opportunities for English learners to acquire information all over the world are open and equal. This greatly pushes English study forward and accelerates the exchange and spread of the English language and its culture.

However, as we are surfing on the Net enjoying free ESL/EFL resources, we also feel its inconvenience which really prevents searching efficiency. For example, if you want to consult an English word on the website of Yahoo or Cambridge International Dictionary of English, you must first log in the homepage of search engine of these two websites, fill the keywords in the search box and then click the "Search" button. After that you can get the search result within seconds. When you want to search keywords on Alta Vista, again you have to visit the search page of Alta Vista, introduce the keywords in the search box and click the search button to show the search result. Even if you open several windows simultaneously at the cost of speed and system resource it is relatively troublesome to switch between windows.

I thought over the inconvenience and studied the markers of some well-known and powerful search engines including some English dictionary search engines. For example, if we search the word "teaching" in Yahoo, we can find in the location box the search marker <http://search.yahoo.com/bin/search?p=teaching>. The matched search result is shown in the page. So, we can of course enter the word only once and replace it with variable. With the aid of web search active control, we can customize our own English dictionary. We declare 2 string type variables. One is valued <http://search.yahoo.com/bin/search?p=> . The other is that of edit box which captures what search word is input. Then with simple addition of the two variables, we can directly and quickly capture the search result in our own application. More importantly, you can add as many search engines or dictionaries as you like in a list, whose items are indexed and can replace the value of the first variable.

For example:

item a:= ' <http://search.yahoo.com/bin/search?p=>' (Yahoo search marker)

item b:= ' [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/cmd_search.asp?searchword='+'](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/cmd_search.asp?searchword=) '&dict=B' (Cambridge Dictionary search marker)

item c:='http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/thesaurus?book=Thesaurus&va=' (Collegiate Thesaurus search marker)

...

...

variable s:= editbox.text (searched target word, here it is “teaching”.)

The search command which is activated by Clicking search button in the source code is only one line:

a+s (if you want to consult Yahoo for the word “teaching”)

or b+s (if you want to look it up in Cambridge International Dictionary of English)

or c+s (if you want to consult Collegiate Thesaurus)

We can add any types of English dictionaries in the list and input the search word only once to have the search results or definitions of the word from the different dictionaries without having to log in their search homepage, which is a waste of time and tedious job. It really raises efficiency.

After collecting markers of search engines or dictionaries, we can integrate them into the project and build a customized and professional English dictionary search program, including functions of editing and navigation if you like. A new and efficient Internet searching and browsing tool, especially for the English learners and teachers, is then created. I built it and named it *Findictionary*, which embeds search markers of the following categories:

1. **General Dictionaries:** including 9 important English dictionaries such as *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, *Collegiate Thesaurus*, *Collegiate Dictionary* and so on.
2. **English Study:** including 6 famous and commonly used dictionaries such as *Acronyms/Abbreviations Search*, *Audible Webster Dictionary*, *The Biographical Dictionary* and so on.
3. **Encyclopedia:** including *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *TechEncyclopedia*.
4. **Search Engines:** including 7 powerful search engines such as *Yahoo*, *Excite* and so on.

5. **Medical Dictionaries:** including 5 influential medical search engines such as *Medical References, Index for Medical Dictionary* and so on.

6. **Law Dictionaries:** including 5 important law dictionary engines such as *Webster's Dictionary of Legal, Lawful Terms, International Law Dictionary* and so on.

Findictionary supports locally direct keywords search, that is, instead of logging in the search page of the above mentioned dictionary you just fill the keywords you want to search in the local program and select from the list of dictionaries. The searching result will be directly shown in the browser. Of course you can perform functions of navigation such as Prev or Next, as in Internet Explorer or Netscape. *Findictionary* is a free and stand-alone executable. It has been tested and included in the libraries of the software review website ZDNET/CNET (www.zdnet.com) and the download site DOWNLOAD/CNET (www.download.cnet.com). The permanent review pages made by them are :

<http://www.zdnet.com/downloads/stories/info/0,10615,86581,00.html>

<http://download.cnet.com/downloads/0-1635474-100-7273222.html>

It can also be downloaded at:

<http://huagong.3322.net/download/findic.zip>

<http://person.longcity.net/home2/guoshesen/download/findic.zip>

<http://guoshesen.533.net/download/findic.zip>

The source codes of the application are also open and free. Anyone who is interested in the full codes or suggestions may contact me.

In fact, many famous and professional Internet search tools such as Mp3 search, news search, book search, lottery search or auction search are based on the above fundamental methodology and the algorithms or rules. We may develop an even better program by adding in multitask or multithreads.

Example activity:

Objectives:

- Build the learner's vocabulary power
- Develop the learner's ability to select right dictionary
- Develop computer literacy skills

Procedures:

1. After launching *Findictionary*, instruct the learner to see Search Word Box, Dictionary Selection Box and Find Button on the clear and well-organised screen. Briefly introduce the only 3 operation steps which are typing search word, selecting dictionary and clicking search button. There are 20 influential dictionaries accessible in Dictionary Selection Box.
2. Learners are divided into 2-4 groups. Tell each group to use one dictionary which should be different from any other groups'.
3. Ask students to search simultaneously the same target word in a given sentence from the handout given by the teacher. Ask the groups to describe the definitions they get. Tell the groups to compare and point out the differences in the definitions. Ask the learners which meaning is the most appropriate and fitting the given sentence.
4. In groups or pairs, talk about how to select the right dictionary for a given purpose or context.
5. Make sentences with the different definitions they get. Compare the meanings of the new sentences with those of the given sentences from the handout.
6. Regroup the learners and redo Step 2 - Step 5.