

Dictionary Skills:

How to use your Indonesian dictionary

As you are allowed to take dictionaries into your written Indonesian exams, it is essential you become skilled in their use so that you do not waste time or misuse them.

The following are tips to help you become a competent and effective user of Indonesian-English and English-Indonesian dictionaries.

Know your dictionary

Take time to find out what your dictionary has to offer e.g.

- the way words are arranged under each entry (e.g. first the noun is given, then the adjective, adverb, pronoun and so on until the verb is given)
- abbreviations e.g. s.o.= someone; s.t.= something; e.o.= each other; *td k= tidak*; *yg= yang*; *dgn= dengan*; *blm= belum*; *dlm = dalam*; *kpd = kepada*; *spt = seperti*.
- guide to pronunciation.

In larger dictionaries a large number of entries and sub-entries provide examples of usage in context, thereby giving some indication of the range of meaning of the items. So make sure you look at the **whole of the entry** for the word you are looking up to make sure you have the appropriate contextual meaning.

Cross checking and homonyms

When you have looked up a word in an English-Indonesian dictionary, and looked at the whole of the entry, then you must cross check it in an Indonesian-English dictionary. This is because the same English word may have several meanings and therefore several Indonesian words. E.g. the word squash has several meanings

- a. I play squash every Saturday
- b. I love eating squash
- c. He accidentally squashed the cake

Which meaning do you want? The game (a), the vegetable (b) or the verb to cause to collapse (c)?

The above is an example of a homonym. You can see that a homonym is a word like another in sound and often in spelling, but different in meaning. Further examples are *meat* and *meet*, or *crane* (the bird) and *crane* (the lifting mechanism); *weather* (the climate), *wether* (a castrated ram) and *whether* (an 'either/or' query).

So when working in class or at home, do use your dictionary: the more you use it, the more comfortable you are with it, and the quicker you become.

Compile your own 'dictionary' or topic vocabulary lists

During normal class work and when reading Indonesian texts, you should always be collecting useful phrases and idiomatic expressions (not just single words). Add these to your own 'dictionary' i.e. vocabulary lists grouped under broad topics. Then **learn them**. Then **revise them on a regular basis**. This will provide you with a quick reference source when writing or speaking on a particular topic, and should enlarge your productive language skills, thus cutting down on time spent consulting the dictionary in an exam.

Using dictionaries in an exam

Manage your time well in an exam! When you see an unknown word, don't panic and don't instantly reach for the dictionary. Just read the rest of the sentence to see if you can get the gist of it. In other words, look at words in the context of the writing, rather than in isolation. If you get the idea of the sentence, then save time: don't consult the dictionary! However if you can't get the idea, then use the dictionary.

Read the exam question carefully. Just what exactly is being asked? If the unknown word has little relevance to the question, and you are able to answer as best you can without looking it up, don't spend valuable time doing so.

Mark for later any words you may want to cross check, but again, only if there is sufficient time to do so.

When writing in exams, try to use the words you know and express your ideas with familiar words and expressions. Using unfamiliar words in exam situations can lead to incorrect usage. This highlights the point made earlier about creating and thoroughly learning your own topic vocabulary lists.

Finally, **do remember to take your dictionaries into the exam**; they are a good resource if used judiciously.

Noun or verb?

When writing or speaking Indonesian you need a clear idea in your own mind whether the word you want is a noun (a thing, event or person) or a verb (a doing or being word).

Words frequently misused in this way are *travel/trip* and *experience*.

(a) Noun	(b) Verb
perjalanan	mengadakan perjalanan bertamasya bepergian berkunjung ke/mengunjungi
pengalaman	mengalami

Examples:

- My trip to Jakarta was enjoyable. *Perjalanan saya ke Jakarta menyenangkan.*
- He wants to travel to Bali after his exams. *Dia mau mengadakan perjalanan/berkunjung ke Bali sesudah menempuh ujiannya.*
- Do you have any experience of this work? *Apakah anda sudah ada pengalaman dalam pekerjaan ini?*
- They experienced many sufferings during their life. *Mereka mengalami banyak penderitaan selama kehidupannya.*

Register

When looking at several translations of a word in the dictionary, think about levels of language: some expressions are more colloquial, some are more formal. What is the register you need - formal or informal?

e.g. to chat = *ngobrol* (informal/colloquial) or *bercakap-cakap* (formal)

The dictionary may indicate these registers by *Sl.* = slang, *Coll.* = colloquial and *Jv.* = Javanese.

Understanding Indonesian base words

The Indonesian language is formed upon the base word system. Therefore, to be able to look up any word that consists of more than just a base word (like *hidup* or *duduk*) in an Indonesian dictionary, you must be able to recognise base words. So when writing down new vocabulary, always include the base word, or root, if appropriate. This will help consolidate in your mind how Indonesian words are formed i.e. how affixes change the base word.

Learn how base words (particularly *me-* verbs and *pe-* nouns) are assigned prefixes according to the first letter of the base word. Once you have learned one base word in each category, use that as your model. Use a word you can easily remember - you'll then remember any in that category.

E.g.

tulis -> *menulis/penulis* (*t* becomes *n*)

ajar -> *mengajar / pengajar* (a vowel is preceded by nasal *ng*)

sebut -> *menyebut/penyebut* (*s* becomes *ny*)

Also listen to how a word **sounds**. With practice you will develop the ability to assign and recognise prefixes intuitively.

E.g. trying to say *mekirim* (b.w. *kirim*) sounds awkward as the syllables do not flow, whereas the correct formation, *mengirim*, flows well and seems logical.

Learn by heart what affixes (prefixes and suffixes) do to their base word. Does it turn the base into a verb or a noun?

E.g,

me + b.w. = a verb which takes an object

pe + b.w. = a noun - the person who carries out the action

ber + b.w. = a verb which is reflexive or doesn't usually take an object

b.w. + *an* = noun

Finally, some dictionary practice:

Using the dictionary, choose the appropriate Indonesian word(s) for the bolded words in the following sentences. The aim of this exercise is to make you question your real intent i.e. what do you really mean? Answers can be found at the end.

- a. **See** you tomorrow
- b. Can you **see** what I mean?
- c. Did you **see** the football match yesterday?
- d. I can **see** a bright star
- e. I want you to **see** this article in the paper
- f. May I **see** you for a moment?
- g. Drop in to **see** us sometime
- h. You should **see** the doctor

Answers:

- a. *sampai*
- b. *mengerti*
- c. *menonton*
- d. *melihat*
- e. *membaca*
- f. *berbicara dengan*
- g. *mengunjungi*
- h. *pergi*