

Preface to Webster's *Collegiate Thesaurus*

WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE THESAURUS is a wholly new book resulting from long study and planning and differing from existent thesauruses in a number of significant respects. It may be worth mentioning that the idea of a thesaurus has been a viable notion in the Merriam-Webster offices since at least 1898 – in which year one of the responsibilities assigned the late Dr. William Torrey Harris when he was appointed Editor in Chief was to do preliminary planning for an improved thesaurus. Over the years that have passed since then, much testing has been done and much information accumulated. Now we are able to issue a thesaurus which, we are satisfied, eliminates many of the defects that impair both past and still existent books of this character.

What does the user look for in a thesaurus? The consensus agrees that he is seeking a more appropriate term than the one he has in mind. This very broad concept is scarcely consonant with the typical thesaurus presentation of "synonyms" and sometimes "antonyms". In point of fact, the user may be seeking a synonym, a word stronger or weaker in force, one of slightly different meaning, a more starchy or more folksy word, an idiomatic phrase that conveys the same idea, or a word that to a greater or less degree contrasts with his starting point. Patently, all these possible uses cannot be subsumed reasonably under the rather unitary notions of "synonym" and "antonym". Perhaps the longevity of Roget's Thesaurus rests on the simple fact that in spite of its complexity and lack of guidance, it does spread before the user a greater body of material to browse through than any comparable book heretofore available. Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus is designed to present a similar range of material but in a readily available and high structured form that minimizes the consultant's need to grope and guess.

In earlier Merriam-Webster publications the pattern of supplementing synonym lists with lists of related and contrasted words, words that were relevant to the group under study yet not quite synonyms or antonyms respectively, was extensively tested. This favorably received feature not only allowed more precise delineation of synonyms and antonyms but

provided the user with much additional significant and pertinent assistance. The same plan of supplementing synonyms and antonyms with genuinely germane collateral material has been made a feature of this new thesaurus.

Additional features of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus designed to facilitate its use are the provision at each main entry of a concise statement of the segment of denotation in which a group of words can be construed as synonyms, a strictly alphabetical organization, and the entry at its own alphabetical place of each word that appears as a synonym at a main entry. The absence or inadequate handling of the first of these features is a major flaw in most existent thesauruses. Though many justifications have been offered for avoiding the second, they all boil down to the implausible notion that the members of the group are synonymous but some are more synonymous than others! Perhaps unfairly, one can't help feeling that the only valid explanation for non-alphabetical listing of properly chosen synonyms appears in one specialized dictionary of synonyms whose author comments, "Apologies are in order, however, for my inability to maintain alphabetical order within the categories, the plea being lack of time." Finally, since no one can anticipate where the user's search may start, it seems only logical to enter each synonym in such a way that it can serve as a convenient starting point in his searching.

The material in Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus has been drawn primarily from Webster's Third New International Dictionary, the Merriam-Webster unabridged dictionary containing more than 460,000 entries. This basic lexicographic reference has been reviewed page by page, entry by entry, and sense by sense in selecting the groups of terms to be entered in the thesaurus. The editors have not restricted themselves, however, to this one source but have freely consulted existent thesauruses and Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary and have not hesitated to draw on the resources of the more than 12,000,000 citations of the massive Merriam-Webster file of English usage to settle doubtful points. Entries of multisense words ordinarily follow the sequence of senses in, though not necessarily the identical numbering of, Webster's Third.

The editor of Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus has been assisted by Michael G. Belanger, William P. Black, Kathleen M. Doherty, Kethryn K. Flynn, Kerry W. Metz, Anne H. Soukhanov, and Raymond R. Wilson, assistant editors. Cross-referencing has been done under the supervision of Grace A.

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