

# HOW-TO GUIDE

# OED HISTORICAL THESAURUS



## What is the Historical Thesaurus?

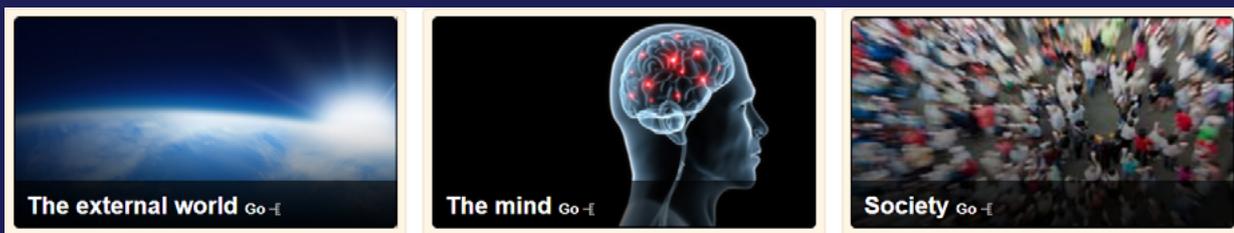
The *Historical Thesaurus* of the OED is a diachronic thesaurus, which provides not just synonyms of a particular word, but synonyms over time, arranged chronologically. It also provides taxonomic classifications, with words placed into categories, which are arranged in a structured hierarchy. The *Historical Thesaurus* is much more than a synonym dictionary – rather, it’s a semantic classification of the language and provides a semantic index to the contents of the OED.

It is a rich resource for looking at how people have spoken about things, places, people or concepts throughout the 1000+ years of language development charted by the OED.

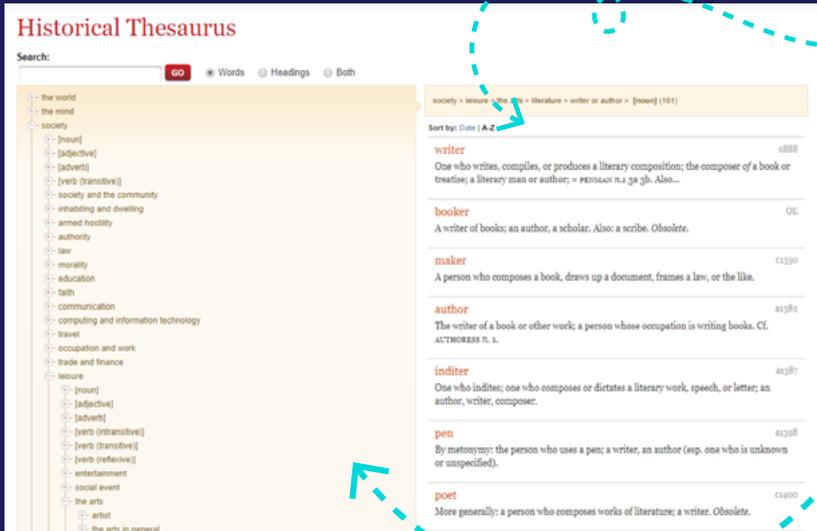
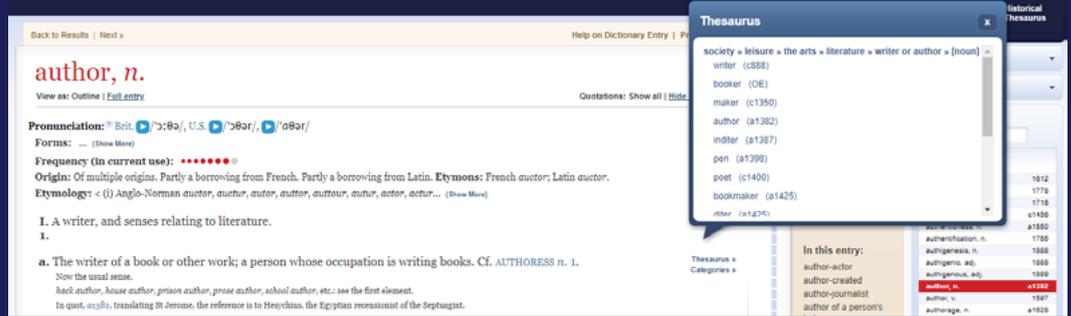
## Using the Historical Thesaurus

There are three ways you can browse the *Historical Thesaurus*:

1. You can browse the *Historical Thesaurus* from the [home page](#), utilising the structured categories. There are 3 top-level categories – the external world, the mind, and society – and 39 second-level categories, all displayed on the home page. Within these are hundreds of subcategories which allow you to explore the lexical history of any given concept or meaning.



2. You can also access the *Historical Thesaurus* directly from any OED entry which has a Thesaurus link. For example, if you click on the Thesaurus link at the first sense of *author*, a pop-up appears with a list of synonyms for ‘writer or author’, including *booker* (Old English), *maker* (c1350), *inditer* (a1387), etc. – from which you can then click through to the OED entries themselves.



From the pop-up box you can click on the category heading to take you to the full Thesaurus section, and see all the synonyms in chronological order.

On the left-hand side of the page you can browse the Thesaurus taxonomy or tree. Click on any category preceded by a + symbol to open up further sub categories. For example, here you can see many categories for specific types of writers and authors, and you can click on any of these to see the words that have been used for these concepts.

3. You can also use the search box to look up words or category headings.

**Words** searches for your term as a dictionary entry (e.g. a search for beautiful finds this term listed as an entry, or a sense of an entry, in 9 categories).

**Headings** searches category headings (e.g. a search for beautiful finds this term used in the headings of 19 categories).

**Both** searches both Words and Headings.



You can also use \* as a wildcard in these searches: for example, a search for *beaut\** retrieves results for *beauty*, *beautiful*, *beautify*, etc.

## Additional Resources

[Explore the Historical Thesaurus online.](#)  
[How to use the OED.](#)  
[Contact us.](#)

