

THE MACMILLAN DICTIONARY VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR



QUIZ ANSWERS

Questions 1 to 5: What do these words mean?

Answer to question 1: The erupting volcano was an *awesome* sight.

Until quite recently, *awesome* had only one meaning: causing feelings of awe (a mixture of wonder and fear). But, as we know, words can acquire new meanings, and in the last 20 years, *awesome* has become popular as a general term of approval (similar to *brilliant* or *great*). This newer meaning has the INFORMAL label in the Macmillan Dictionary, and the definition adds that it is “used mainly by young people”. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entry for [awesome](#).

Answer to question 2: Can I *get* a coffee, please?

This usage of *get*, to obtain, receive, or be given something, has attracted a lot of criticism, especially from speakers of British English, who often see it as an unwanted import from American English. This use of *get* originated in the US, and became familiar to British speakers through its use in American sitcoms. But it is now very common in most parts of the English-speaking world. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entry for [get](#).

Answer to question 3: Some people are *disinterested* in politics.

Disinterested has two meanings. It can mean the same as *uninterested* (as in our example), but it is also used to describe someone who is impartial and not influenced by the possibility of personal gain. The use of *disinterested* to mean “not interested” is widely disliked by traditionalists. Their main objection is that using it like this is bound to cause confusion. This is a very weak argument. Polysemy (the fact of words having more than one meaning) is a standard feature of all languages, and in normal communication misunderstandings are rare because the context almost always makes clear which of a word’s meanings fits the sentence. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entry for [disinterested](#).

Answer to question 4: Reaching the door, she paused *momentarily*, then knocked.

Momentarily has two quite different meanings. It can mean “for a very short time” or “very soon, in a short time from now”. The latter meaning is shown in the sentence in our quiz. This second use of *momentarily* is typical of American English, and is rarely (if ever) used by speakers of British English. So although the sentence is not “wrong”, it wouldn’t be appropriate in a context where British English is the standard variety and your meaning might be misinterpreted. You will sometimes hear people criticizing a usage simply because it belongs to a different variety of English or is typical of a particular register. The key is “appropriacy” – matching the words you use to the situation you’re using them in. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entry for [momentarily](#).

Answer to question 5: We were asked not to divulge what had *transpired* at the meeting.

In its original use, *transpire* describes what leaves do when they give off water vapour, and this meaning is still common in texts about botany or gardening. Its two other meanings are “to become publicly known” (often in expressions like “it later transpired that...”), and simply “to happen” – the meaning used in the sentence in our quiz. For some reason, this use is disliked by traditionalists but it has been around for about 200 years, and is fairly frequent. One argument against it is that there is no need for it: we already have two perfectly good words (*happen* and *occur*) so why use another one? But this doesn’t really stand up: English is full of words with very similar meanings (think of *let*, *allow* and *permit*), but that isn’t a reason to ban one of them. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entry for [transpire](#).

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Questions 6 to 10: Which word would you use?

Answer to question 6: *Who/Whom* did you invite to your party?

Some people will tell you that *whom* is correct here, because we're talking about the object of the verb *see*, and *whom* is – traditionally – the object form of *who*. In reality, corpus evidence shows that *whom* is mainly used after a preposition (e.g. *six teachers, four of whom are women*). It is almost never used at the beginning of a sentence, so *who* is a more natural choice. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entries for [who](#) and [whom](#).

Answer to question 7: I *would/should* like to go to the concert.

There is a traditional rule that you use *shall* and *should* in first-person constructions but *will* and *would* when the subject is in the second or third person. This used to be commonly followed. However, our corpus evidence shows that very few people still observe this rule. In fact, the expression "I would like to..." is used 50 times more frequently than "I should like to...". So although both options are correct, it's much more natural to use *would* here, and *should* sounds old-fashioned. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entries for [would](#) and [should](#).

Answer to question 8: I am *bored of/with* watching football.

Traditionally, the adjective *bored* is followed by the preposition *with*. But our evidence shows that *of* is now frequently used instead. Although *bored with* is still more frequent, there is a clear trend towards *bored of*, and this is now very common among younger people. Both are acceptable, but it's good to be aware that not everyone approves of *bored of* (at least not yet!). For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entry for [bored](#).

Answer to question 9: I cook my porridge *as/like* my dad does.

As is a conjunction, but according to older grammar books, *like* should never be used as a conjunction – it should only be used as a preposition, in a sentence such as "She's a teacher, *like* me". However, there is plenty of evidence for *like* being used in sentences such as "I cook my porridge *like* my dad does". Both options are correct, therefore: *like* and *as* can both be used as conjunctions, but *like* is a little more informal. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entries for [as](#) and [like](#).

Answer to question 10: *Can/May* I bring my sister to the movie?

Older textbooks will tell you that *may* is the correct verb to use when you are asking for permission, and that *can* is wrong. But the evidence in our corpus shows that this use of *may* has been declining for the last 30 years or more, and nowadays it is quite rare. When asking for permission, people say "Can I?" at least ten times more often than they say "May I?". So in this case, "Can I bring my sister too?" would be the more natural choice. For more information, check out the Macmillan Dictionary entries for [can](#) and [may](#).