

• Shorter  
Oxford  
ENGLISH  
Dictionary

FIFTH EDITION

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED DICTIONARIES

**firmless** *adjective*, *poet.* L16 M18

[From *FIRM* *adjective* + *-LESS*.]  
Unsteady, shifting.

**firm** *noun*, *noun* M19

[German from Old High German *firm* 'old', rel. to Old Saxon *firm* 'just', *firm* 'firmly', Old Norse *firm* 'ancient' (Swedish *firm* 'former').]  
= *NEVE*.

**firry** *adjective* E19

[From *FIR* + *-RY*.]  
Having many firsts; of or pertaining to the fir.

**first** *adjective*, *adverb*, & *noun* (ordinal numeral)

[Old English *first* = Old Frisian *first*, *et.*, *first*, Old High German *first* (from *prince*, whence German *Fürst*), Old Norse *first*, from Germanic *super-*, from Indo-European base also of Latin *primus*, Greek *πρῶτος*, Sanskrit *prathama*.]

- ▶ **A adjective**. 1 Preceding all others in time, order, series, succession, etc.; earliest in occurrence, existence, etc.; basic, that is number one in a series; represented by 1st, OE. ▶ **b** Occurring or presenting itself next after a given point of time (expressed or implied). E17
- 2 Foremost or most advanced in position. OE.
- 3 Foremost in rank, importance, or excellence. ME.
- ▶ **b** In official titles: having precedence over all others. M18

1 S. JOHNSON Each of the six first lines of the *Iliad* might lose two syllables. T. HARDY Mr Clare... whose first wife had died... married a second late in life. SCOTT FITZGERALD I thought of the first sheep I ever remember seeing. L. MURDOCH An April evening... the big trees in first leaf. DAY LEWIS Memories from my first two years. G. GORDON For the first few years of his working life... he had had to work every second Saturday. **first conjugation**, **first declension**, etc.

**b** MORTIMER COLLINS I shall get back to London by the first train. 2 OED The first horse in the race. 3 J. OZELL Courage, a General's first Quality. H. MARTINEAU I was told a great deal about 'the first people in Boston'. ▶ **b** **first cellist**, **first lieutenant**, **first Lord of the Treasury**, **First Sea Lord**, **first violin**, etc.

- ▶ **B adverb**. 1 Before anyone or anything else, in time, rank, serial order, etc. OE. ▶ **b** Originally, OE-E18
- 2 Before another specified or implied thing, time, event, etc.; as the first point in a topic, argument, etc., in the first place. ME. ▶ **b** In preference to something else; rather; more likely. LME.
- 3 For the first time, then and not earlier. ME.
- 4 *ellipt.* Travelling first class. L19.

1 S. SCOTT FITZGERALD After greeting Rosemary and her mother he waited for them to speak first. *Proverb*: First come, first served. 2 A. R. PENNINGTON It is impossible for the priest to remit the sins of any unless they are first remitted by Christ. J. BUCHAN She could scarcely refuse to give him breakfast first. J. STEINBECK He... slipped off first one shoe and then the other. **b** BROWNING Die? He'll bribe a gaoler or break prison first. 3 T. HARDY He... surveyed people up and down when first making their acquaintance. G. GREENE In this story of... Hunca-Munca... the unmistakable Potter style first appears.

- ▶ **C noun**. 1 **1** The first person or thing of a category, series, etc., identified contextually, as day of the month, following a proper name; person, esp. monarch or pope, of the specified name; base in baseball, etc. ME.
- 2 The first part, the beginning. LME.
- 3 **HERALDRY**. The tincture first mentioned in a blazon. M16

1 OED He is always the first to find fault. S. BECKETT [was stopped by a second policeman, similar in all respects to the first. 2 F. MARRIAT We shall be able to stem the first of the flood. D. H. LAWRENCE It was wrong from the first it was wrong to begin with.

- ▶ **II 4 gen.** A person who or thing which is first. L16.
- 5 **MUSIC**. The highest part of a duet, trio, etc. L18.
- 6 *In pl.* Goods of the best quality. E19.
- 7 A person having a place in the first class of an examination, (the winner of) first place in a race etc. M19.
- 8 A first-class compartment, carriage, or section, on a train etc. E20.
- 9 A first edition (of a book). E20.
- 10 - **first gear** below. E20.
- 11 The first known or discovered example of a thing; a first instance or occurrence, esp. of something notable. M20

7 S. SPENDER To gain a First, a Scholarship, ... seemed as difficult as scaling some great height. J. DIDION She took all the jumpy firsts at the... horse show. 11 J. F. STRAKER 'I'm sorry about that, Paul.' That made another first: they had not used Christian names before.

*Phrases etc.* **after first brush**: see **BRUSH** *noun* 1. **at first** at the beginning; **at first blush**: see **BLUSH** *noun* 1. **at first brush**: see **BRUSH** *noun* 1. **at the first blush**: see **BLUSH** *noun* 1. **come in first** win a race. **double first**: see **DOUBLE** *adjective* & *adverb*. **feet first** (a) with the feet in front; (b) colloq. in a coffin, dead. **first and foremost** (a) first and most important; (b) **first and last** taking one thing with another, all in all, from start to finish. **first in, first out** (a) of a system of accounting in which the goods first acquired by a company are valued as though they are the first to be sold; (b) **COMPUTING** designating or pertaining to a procedure in which the item removed from a buffer, queue, etc., is always the

one that has been in the longest. **first of all** before anyone or anything else; **firstly**. **first off** *colloq.* (orig. US) at first, to begin with. **first or last** sooner or later. **first past the post** (designating the winner of an election by virtue of receiving the most votes though perhaps not having an absolute majority). **first up** *colloq.* first of all, at the first attempt. **first-wicket partnership**: see **WICKET** 3b. **from first to last** throughout. **from the first** from the beginning. **for the first time**: see **FOR** *preposition*. **head first** with the head in front. **in the first flight**: see **FLIGHT** *noun*. **in the first instance**: see **INSTANCE** *noun*. **In the first place** first, firstly, to begin with. **of the first head**: see **HEAD** *noun*. **of the first order** [French *de premier ordre*] outstanding, excellent. **of the first water**: see **WATER** *noun* 10b. **on first blush**, **on the first blush**: see **BLUSH** *noun* 1. **the first** the beginning; even one elementary thing (about).

*Special collocations & comb.* (As ordinal.) Forming compound ordinal numerals with multiples of ten: **as forty-first**, **41st**, **five-thousand-and first** (5000th), etc. (As adjective.) **first aid** help given to an injured person until medical treatment is available. **first-aid post** a place where first aid is available. **first-aider** a person trained or skilled in first aid. **first base**: see **BASE** *noun* 1. **first blood**: see **BLOOD** *noun*. **first blush**: see **BLUSH** *noun* 1. **first-born** *adjective* & *noun* (a) *adjective* that is born first, eldest; (b) *noun* one's first or eldest child. **first brush**: see **BRUSH** *noun 1. **First Cause**: see **CAUSE** *noun. **first chop**: see **CHOP** *noun*. **first coat** a first layer of paint etc. **first comer** a first or earliest arrival. **First Consul**: see **CONSUL** 3. **first cost** = **prime cost** *sv*. **prime** *adjective*. **first cousin**: see **COUSIN** *noun*. **first cross** the crossing of two pure breeds, an offspring of such a cross. **first day** (a) Sunday, esp. among the Society of Friends; (b) the first day of issue of stamps etc.; (**first day cover** = **cover** *noun*). **first degree** *spec* (a) the least serious category of burn; (b) the most serious category of crime; (**principal in the first degree**: see **PRINCIPAL** *noun* 2a). **first-degree** *adjective* (a) of a burn affecting only the epidermis; (b) (of murder) premeditated and without mitigating circumstances. **first derivative**: see **DERIVATIVE** *noun* 3. **first edition** the first printed form in which a book etc. is published; the whole number of copies in this form; one copy in this form. **first finger** the finger next to the thumb. **first floor** the floor immediately above the ground floor. *N Amer.* the ground floor. **First Folio**: see **FOLIO** *noun*. **first-foot** *noun* & *verb* (chiefly Scot.) (a) *noun* the first person to cross the threshold in the New Year; (b) *verb intrans.* be such a person; go on a round of visits as a New Year begins (chiefly as **first-footing** *verbal noun*). **first-footer** a person who first-foots or goes first-footing. **first-fruits** (a) the first products of agriculture for the season, esp. as offered to God; (b) the first results of work etc.; (c) *hist.* a payment to a superior by the new holder of an office, esp. an ecclesiastical office. **first gear** the lowest or bottom forward gear in a motor vehicle, bicycle, etc. **first-generation** *adjective* of a computer distinguished by the use of vacuum tubes and belonging essentially to the period 1945-55. **first good**: see **GOOD** *noun*. **first intention**: **first lady** the most important lady; US *spec.* the wife of the President, or another appointed woman acting as hostess for him. **first language** one's native language. **first lesson**: see **LESSON** *noun* 2. **first lieutenant**: **first light** the time when light first appears in the morning. **first line** (orig. *MILITARY*) the line of fighting forces or fig. the group of people who are most advanced or of the highest quality. **First Lord of the Treasury**: see **TREASURY**. **first love** (the emotion felt) the first time one falls in love; the person with whom one falls in love for the first time; one's favourite occupation, possession, etc. **first mover**: **first name** a person's personal given or Christian name, as opp. to his or her surname; **on first-name terms**: sufficiently friendly to address each other by first names; **first-name** *verb trans.* address by first name; be on first-name terms with; **first night** the first public performance of a play etc. **first-nighter** a person who attends a first night or first nights. **first offender** an offender against the law against whom no previous conviction is recorded. **first officer** (a) the mate on a merchant ship; (b) the second in command to the captain on an aircraft. **first person**: see **PERSON** *noun*. **first position** (a) *MUSIC* the lowest possible position of the hand on the finger-board of a stringed instrument; (b) *BALLET* a disposition of the body in which the legs are together with heels touching, and the toes are turned out at a right angle. **first post**: see **POST** *noun*. **first quarter**: see **QUARTER** *noun* 7b. **first reading** the first of three successive readings on which a bill must have been presented to a legislature before it becomes law, permitting its introduction. **first refusal**: see **REFUSAL** 3. **first school** a primary school intended for children between the ages of 5 and 9. **First Sea Lord**: see **SEA**. **First Secretary**: see **SECRETARY** *noun*. **first sergeant** US the highest ranking non-commissioned officer in a company. **first sound**: see **SOUND** *noun*. **first starey**: see **STOREY** *noun*. **first strike** an aggressive attack with nuclear weapons before their use by the enemy. **first string**: see **STRING** *noun*. **first thing** (a) the most elementary or rudimentary thing (freq. in *not know the first thing about*); (b) *adverb* *colloq.* before anything else; (c) **first things first**, the most important things before any others. **first-time** *buyer* a person seeking to buy a home who has not previously owned one and so has none to sell. **first-timer** a person who does or is something for the first time. **First War** = **First World War** *sv*. **World first water**: see **WATER** *noun* to **First World** (a) *hist.* the US and USSR; (b) the developed countries apart from the former Communist bloc. **First World War**: see **WORLD** *noun*.**

▶ **firstness** *noun* LME

**first class** *adjective* & *noun* M18

[From *FIRST* *adjective* + *CLASS* *noun*.]  
▶ **A noun** *phr.* at first hand, directly from the first source, without intermediate agency. M18.

▶ **B adjective**. Of or pertaining to the first source, original, coming direct from the first source, derived from personal experience. M18.

H. GUNTRIP Those who criticize psychoanalysis rarely show firsthand knowledge of events in the field later than... about 1908.

▶ **C adverb**. Directly from the first source, at first hand. M19.

H. S. KNIGHT The prostitutes had learned first-hand of a secret.

**firstling** *noun* & *adjective* M16

[From *FIRST* *adjective* + *-LING*.]  
▶ **A noun**. The first product or result of something; the first offspring of a season. USU. *in pl.* M16

▶ **B attrib.** or *as adjective*. That is the first product or result; first-born. E17.

**firstly** *adverb* & *adjective* M16

[From *FIRST* *adjective* + *-LY*.]  
▶ **A adverb**. As the first point in a topic, argument, etc.; in the first place. M16.

▶ **B noun**. A use of the word *firstly*. *rare*. L17.

**first-rate** *adjective* & *adverb* M17

[From *FIRST* *adjective* + *RATE* *noun* 1].  
▶ **A noun**. 1 *Hist.* The highest of the rates or classes by which warships were distinguished according to the number of guns they carried. M17

2 A warship of the first rate (*hist.*): a person or thing of the highest class or rank (now *rare*). L17.

▶ **B adjective**. 1 *Hist.* Of a warship of the first rate. L17.

2 Of the highest class or excellence; extremely good, excellent. *colloq.* M18.

M. E. G. DUFF As long as France remained a first-rate power, M. GORDON Her misfortune was to be a merely first-rate painter in an age of geniuses.

▶ **C adverb**. Excellently, very well. *colloq.* M19.

B. W. ALDRISS 'You're looking first-rate.' 'And you, Sicily evidently agrees with you.'

▶ **first-rater** *noun* a first-rate person or thing. E19.

**frith** *noun* M16

[Metath. var. of *FRITH* *noun* 1].  
A (hunting) forest; a coppice, a small wood.

**frith** *noun* M16

[Old Norse *frith* = *FIORD*; cf. *FRITH* *noun* 1].  
An arm of the sea; a river estuary.

**fisc** *noun* M16

[French, or Latin *FISCUS* 'rush-basket, purse, treasury'.]  
1 *Hist.* Orig. the private treasury of the Roman emperors, later developing into a public treasury but retaining considerable imperial control. L16. ▶ **b** An exchequer. *Now rare*. L16.

2 **SCOTS LAW**. The public treasury or Crown to which estates lapse by escheat; the revenue to the Crown by escheat. Formerly also, the right of the Crown to the estate of a rebel. *obsolete exc.* *Hist.* L17.

**fiscal** *adjective* & *noun* M16

[French, or Latin *fiscalis*, from *fiscus* 'treasury'; see *prec.*.]  
▶ **A adjective**. 1 Of or pertaining to a treasury. *Now chiefly*, of or pertaining to governmental financial matters. M16

2 Of or pertaining to financial matters in general. *Chiefly* US. M19.

with) a place in the highest division of an examination list. L18.

▶ **B adjective**. Belonging to, achieving, travelling by, etc., the first class; of the best quality, very good; of the highest order. M19.

R. K. NARAYAN This threatened to develop into a first-class crisis. F. FORSYTH Harcourt-Smith was of the university intake, with a first-class degree. *Times* The price of the first class stamp has remained at 17p since September 1984.

*Comb.*: **first-classman** a person with a first-class degree.

▶ **C adverb**. By first-class accommodation in a train, boat, aircraft, etc.; by first-class mail. *colloq.* excellently. L19.

**first hand** *adjective* & *adverb* M18

[From *FIRST* *adjective* + *HAND* *noun*.]  
▶ **A noun** *phr.* at first hand, directly from the first source, without intermediate agency. M18.

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*Special collocations.* **fiscal agent** a bank or trust company appointed by a corporation etc. to act as its financial representative. **fiscal drag** *economics* (a) deflationary effect on economic growth caused by the tendency of tax yields to increase at a higher rate than inflation when tax allowances remain fixed. **fiscal engineer** US a specialist in fiscal engineering. **fiscal engineering** US management of the finances of a firm so as to take maximum advantage of tax exemptions etc. **fiscal year** (chiefly *N Amer.*) a financial year (for the US Government, beginning 1 October before 1976, 1 July).