Choose the Right Dictionary
In addition to the general purpose dictionary and the thesaurus, consider using specialty dictionaries for your discipline. Note that different parts of the English-speaking world use different versions of English; Make sure you are using a dictionary of American English.

Read the Introduction
The introductory section of your dictionary will explain important information such as the abbreviations and pronunciation symbols used throughout the entries.

Learn the Abbreviations
Dictionaries often have abbreviations in the definitions for a word. This can be confusing if you don't know what the abbreviations stand for. Typically, a dictionary will have a list of abbreviations near the front of the book -- either in the introduction, or after it.

Learn the Guide to Pronunciation
If you immediately jump right into reading the dictionary without understanding the pronunciation guide, it can be difficult to figure it out. Having an idea about the symbols of pronunciation will make it a lot easier for you.

Review English Alphabetization
Dictionaries follow alphabetical order. If you're not entirely sure what the first letter is, start with the letter it sounds like. If you can't find the word under that section, then try other sections.

Read the Guide Words
These are the two words at the top of each page that tell you what groups of words are on the page. These words will help you find the word you're looking for in the right letter section.

Read the Definitions
Once you've located the word it will tell you exactly what it means (and if it has more than one meaning, it will tell you the most common one first), how to pronounce it, how to capitalize it (if it's a proper noun), what part of speech it is, its origins, its synonyms and antonyms, etc.

Look for Collocations
Learning the meaning of a single word is not usually enough. English is a subtle language, and the meanings of words often shift depending on which other words appear with it. Learn words in combination to expand your vocabulary and understanding faster.