

# WORD CHOICE



## DENOTATION VS. CONNOTATION

# The difference words can make...

## Denotation vs. Connotation



**Denotation** - literal meaning of a word (dictionary definition)

**Connotation** - suggestive meaning - associations or emotional connections to words

Taking this into consideration, it is important to pay attention to your word choices because words can convey emotional connections or reactions that are either favourable or offensive.

Check out some examples of synonyms (words that mean basically the same thing) that have very different connotations (feelings associated with them)



Positive	Neutral	Negative
homeless	people without homes	Vagrants/hobos
lady	woman	chick/ babe
critter	animal	beast
svelte/slim	thin	skinny/scrawny
home	house	residence
little one	child	brat

# More thoughts on Connotation

Distinguishing between two words that seem to mean the same, but have different colors and shapes and suggestions--this is essential to the art of writing, and also of speaking. . . .

- My inability to warm up to strangers is caused by "shyness," but yours is caused by "stand-offishness."
- I take you to a restaurant that is "charmingly unpretentious," but you take me to a restaurant that is a "dive."
- Jane marries John because of his "boyish charm"--and divorces him because of his "immaturity."

# More examples



- I am "strong-minded," but you are "opinionated."
- I am opposed to your newfangled ideas because I believe in "the value of tradition," but you are opposed to my sensible reforms because you are "blindly clinging to the past."
- They try to change Our minds by "propaganda," but We try to change Their minds by "information."
- When my candidate reverses his mind after election, it proves he is "open minded"; when yours does the same thing, it shows him up as "a man of no principle."

# Connotation Exercise #1

Below are groups of words which are often used to describe people.

What are the connotations of the words?

1. Childlike, Youthful, Childish, Young
2. Disabled, Crippled, Handicapped, Retarded
3. Relaxed, Laid-back, Lackadaisical, Easy-going
4. Slim, Skinny, Slender, Thin
5. Cheap, Frugal, Miserly, Economical
6. Young, Immature, Juvenile, Youthful
7. Inquisitive, Interested, Curious, Convivial
8. Confident, Secure, Proud, Egotistical
9. Lovely, Knockout, Beautiful, Stunning
10. Talkative, Conversational, Chatty, Nosy

Childish and childlike implies that someone is immature, but youthful infers that someone is lively and energetic

Crippled, handicapped, and retarded have negative connotations and are no longer used because they are considered offensive.

# Answers



3. Lackadaisical means that someone is not interested and is lacking life.
4. Skinny implies that someone is too thin.
5. Cheap, frugal, and miserly infers that someone is not generous and is very stingy with their money.
6. Immature and juvenile suggest that someone is childish.
7. Inquisitive can mean that someone asks too many questions.
8. Proud and egotistical mean that someone thinks very highly of themselves.
9. Although knockout can be taken as a compliment, it can also be considered sexist when referring to a woman.
10. Talkative and chatty can mean that someone talks too much; and nosy that someone asks too many questions.

# Connotation Exercise #2



Read the sentences below. Can you identify the words that have a negative connotation?

1. Bedford is an uppity neighborhood, but the rents are cheap.
2. On my flight to Los Angeles, I sat next to this babe. She was absolutely stunning.
3. Every morning my neighbor takes his mutt to the park. It always barks loudly when leaving the building.
4. You need to be pushy when you are looking for a job.
5. Bob is quite vocal at every staff meeting. He always speaks.

Answers: 1. Uppity; 2. Babe; 3. Mutt; 4. Pushy; 5. Vocal



# Some Tips to Consider



- There are certain circumstances when you might want to deliberately use a word that carries less than a positive connotation; however, you may want to avoid mistakenly using a word with a negative or misleading connotation.
- Depending on the context, the connotation of a word choice can change the meaning of a sentence considerably. For example, using the words “chick” or “babe” to refer to a woman often carry a negative connotation, especially if women are part of the audience. Those same words, however, may not cause much offence amongst a group of men talking about Angelina Jolie.
- [Demi Lovato being called "woman" on XFactor](#)



# Beautiful & Ugly Words



One of the many fascinating features of our language is how often words with pleasant associations are also quite pleasing on the tongue and even to the eye, and how many words, by contrast, acoustically and visually corroborate their disagreeable nature — look no further than the heading of this page.

# Beautiful & Ugly Words

Beguile – deceive  
Enchanted – charmed  
Enrapture – delighted  
Etiquette – proper conduct  
Epiphany – revelation  
Exuberant – abundant, unrestrained  
Idyllic – contentedly pleasing  
Iridescent – luster  
Lullaby – soothing song  
Plethora – abundance  
Radiant – glowing  
Serene – peaceful  
Succulent – juicy  
Sublime – exalted, transcendent  
Tranquility - peacefulness

Cacophony – confused noise  
Coarse – common, crude, rough  
Cynical – distrustful, self-interested  
Decrepit – worn-out, run-down  
Disgust – aversion, distaste  
Grimace – expression of disgust or pain  
Grotesque – distorted, bizarre  
Leech – parasite  
Mediocre – ordinary, of low quality  
Rancid – offensive, smelly  
Repulsive – disgusting  
Shrill – high-pitched  
Slaughter – butcher, carnage  
Visceral – crude, anatomically graphic

# Connotation at play



- The teacher was **unreasonable/thoughtless/preposterous**.
- That was an **unwise/stupid** mistake.
- Your child has a **poor work ethic/is lazy**.
- The **homeless man/vagrant/hobo** is in **need/requires/could use/is entitled to a good/nourishing/gourmet** meal.

How do the highlighted words change the meaning of the sentence?

# Final Thoughts



As you read and listen to other people speak, you cultivate a rich vocabulary of precise and colourful words that let you say exactly what you want – not come close, but nail it on the head. This is the essence of good word choice. Every new word increases your writing power.

*Enrich the poetry of your prose by applying words that provide precise connotation while evoking emotional responses.*

STOP  
TALK.  
ING

FEELING TO STOP STOP TALKING

TRYING

TO STOP  
TOUCHING  
AM

WHEN DID IT BECAME

TO STOP COMMUNICATING

JUST  
BECAUSE YOU FEEL  
LIKE IT JUST BECAUSE YOU  
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