

Denotation and Connotation

Careful writers choose words both for what they mean (that is, their [dictionary](#) meanings, or [denotations](#)) and for what they suggest (their [connotations](#), or emotional associations). For instance, "slim," "scrawny," and "svelte" all have related denotative meanings (thin, let's say) but different connotative meanings. And if we're trying to pay someone a compliment, we better get the connotation right.

Here's another example. The following words and phrases all refer to "a young person," but their connotations may be quite different depending, in part, on the context in which they appear: *youngster*, *child*, *kid*, *little one*, *small fry*, *brat*, *urchin*, *juvenile*, *minor*. Some of these words tend to carry favorable connotations (*little one*), others unfavorable (*brat*), and still others fairly neutral connotations (*child*). Calling a young person a *brat* lets our readers know at once how we feel about the rotten kid.

Denotation and Connotation

A word may suggest something quite different from what it really means.

EVERY WORD HAS a *denotation*—its definition as found in a dictionary. But many words also have a *connotation*—the feelings or images they bring to mind.

Example 1

Snake: *Denotation*: scaly, legless reptile

Connotation: danger, evil, disloyal person

Even words that mean the same may have different connotations. Think about the synonyms *scary* and *terrifying*. They have similar meanings, but produce different feelings. There's a big difference between the scary sound of the howling wind and a terrifying experience like falling off a cliff!

Authors choose words to influence how readers feel. The words may suggest positive or negative connotations.

Example 2

I saw many *homeless people* on the streets of the city. (*positive*)

I saw many *bums* on the streets of the city. (*negative*)

1. A Brief Study Of Words Used in Denotation and Connotation. V. Chandra Sekhar Rao. 2007.
2. Oxford Reference.com. Denotation and Connotation.

English Idioms

Joey Plays Soccer

Idioms related to feet or legs

Joey was getting ready for the soccer game. He was nervous because he was new on the team but the coach told him that it was time for him to get his feet wet. He knew this was soccer, but the day was dry and he didn't expect that he would get wet feet. Joey knew that there were four other brand new players on the team but he had been practicing very hard so that he would have a leg up over some of the other new players. He was so nervous that his coach asked him if he was getting cold feet. He didn't understand his new coach because his feet were nice and cozy since his mom had bought him new socks. He had made certain that he got to the game very early and had just been kicking around killing time waiting for the game to start. Joey said he could kick myself because his mom forgot to bring his new team jacket to the game. He was so proud of his new jacket. He decided not to kick up a fuss over the missing jacket as he wanted to concentrate on being the best of the new players. He had wanted to kick start his soccer skills and get a leg up on the other players so he had just finished taking part in an all summer soccer camp, and none of the other new players had attended. The game had started badly and they were already down 2 points when the coach told him it was time for him to get on the field because he said they needed fresh legs. Joey didn't know what that meant but he was ready to jump for joy and the idea of being able to play. As he ran out onto the field the coach told him to break a leg. He said this with an encouraging smile on his face but Joey didn't think it was very nice of the coach to want him to break his leg. He also told him to kick butt, but Joey knew that you couldn't go around kicking other players on purpose. The coach saw the puzzled look on Joey's face and realized that he didn't understand break a leg and kick butt were just expressions. So he called out to Joey and told him that he was just pulling your leg. This left Joey even more confused. The first leg of getting onto the field was to report to the team manager and ask him who he was replacing. After he reported he started to run out onto the field too soon and he almost jumped the gun. When the player he was replacing left the field the tired player told Joey it was his turn to have a kick at the cat. By now Joey was so confused he wasn't certain he was even going to be playing soccer but some weird game where you kicked cats. He saw that the soccer ball was moving down the field at a good clip so he took up his position by dropping back into a supporting position. A player on the other team started making fun of him to try to distract him from the game. The other player called him twinkle toes and told him he looked like Big Foot and said "I can run circles around you." All this strange language and being made fun of confused Joey so much that he ran over to the coach and asked him what was going on. The coach said, "I'm going to put my foot down Joey, stop acting so silly get back on your feet and get back into the game." Finally Joey decided that he did know how to play soccer, even if he didn't understand all the weird language everyone was using. He ran back onto the field and played brilliantly. He scored two goals to tie up the game. The coach pulled him off the field and told him it was a kick to see his newest player playing so

well but that it was now time for him to [kick back](#) before he [kicked the bucket](#). He also said, "Joey, you sure [landed on your feet](#) , when you first went in and then came back off the field to talk to me, I thought that it was a mistake to put you in the game today. You [sweep me off my feet](#) when I see you pass." The final score of the game was 3 to 2 for them and Joey had been the main reason the team won the game. He was thrilled and on the ride home his mom told him that she was making a special dinner for him and that he and his dad could go surfing and [hang ten](#) while she got dinner ready. Joining a new soccer team, saving the game and [to boot](#) getting to go surfing with his dad while his mom made him his favorite dinner. Wow! What a day. He hoped his mom would have a [lead foot](#) for the trip home because he couldn't wait to get to the beach and get out on his surfboard. Maybe while he was surfing he could ask his dad about all the weird talking that he had heard today. Maybe his dad could explain it all to him. What a day!

Meaning:

1. try doing something for the first time.
2. to gain an advantage over someone else.
3. change your mind about doing something (like a bride to be).
4. not doing anything special, wasting time.
5. Wasting time until some thing else happens.
6. to be upset with yourself .
7. complain loudly about something that has happened.
8. to do something early so that it will be easier to complete the task.
9. When something or someone starts moving well again.
10. to be very happy.
11. an expression used to wish people good luck especially for people going on stage.
12. To promise to win easily, to say you won easily, or to discipline someone.
13. when you tell someone something that is not true but only a joke.
14. in a race or journey, the first leg is the first section of the trip.
15. Start something early.
16. have another chance to do something.
17. to be moving at a fast speed.
18. to step back from being the leader, or in a sport to stay behind the person with the ball or puck.
19. Good dancer or very good moving on your feet.
20. A mythological ape-man supposedly living in the forest of western north America also know as a sasquatch.
21. A promise to out perform someone.
22. Insist that something be done.
23. Recover after having had some problems either health or economic.
24. To enjoy doing something.
25. Relax.
26. Die.
27. after some disappointment, everything turns out to be okay again.
28. charm you or entrance you.
29. To let all your toes curl over the edge of the surfboard or to surf with enthusiasm.
30. in addition to one bad thing happening, another bad thing happens.
31. drives a car too fast.

What are idioms?

Definition

An idiom (also called idiomatic expression) is an expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning conventionally understood by native speakers. This meaning is different from the literal meaning of the idiom's individual elements. In other words, idioms don't mean exactly what the words say. They have, however, hidden meaning.

Examples

- "Kick the bucket"
- "Spill the beans"

The meaning of these expressions is separate from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which they are made. Their meaning are however used figuratively. They mean respectively:

- "to die "
- "to tell people secret information"

ahead of one's time: in advance of concurrent commonly accepted ideas; showing characteristics of changes yet to be; present in one's work before later advances in the field.

Example:

With his new scientific discoveries, he was ahead of his time.

call it a day: to stop working for the rest of the day.

Example:

Why don't we call it a day? I'm really tired

moment in the sun: A brief instance in which an otherwise obscure, unremarkable, or humble person draws attention.

Example:

That band got their moment in the sun during the 70s.

money talks: money talks suggest that with money people can get whatever they want.

Example:

She got what she wanted. Well you know money talks!

feel blue: to feel sad.

Example: *She felt blue after her divorce.*

Denotation and Connotation

Activity one:

1. Give the meaning of each word.
2. Identify each word as positive, negative, or neutral. Keep in mind that most words can be either, depending on the context.
3. Choose 3-4 words from the list and demonstrate their meanings with a drawing or a short skit.
 - *Student, apprentice, disciple, junior, learner, novice, scholar, undergraduate.*
 - *Skinny, bony, angular, emaciated, gaunt, malnourished, scrawny, slender, thin, anorexic.*
 - *Run, amble, bound, dart, dash, gallop, lope, scamper, sprint.*
 - *Vacation, break, fiesta, furlough, holiday, intermission, layoff, recess, respite, sabbatical.*
 - *Busy, active, diligent, employed, occupied, persevering, unavailable, employed.*
 - *Fear, dread, apprehension, anxiety, panic, terror.*
 - *Fat, obese, chubby, stout, plump, stocky.*
 - *Friend, companion, buddy, acquaintance, colleague, playmate.*

Activity two: In each of the following sentences, the italicized word has a fairly neutral connotation. For each word in italics, list *two synonyms* (words with similar denotations): one with a negative connotation and the other with a positive connotation.

1. I recognized the familiar *smell* of my roommate's cooking.

2. Scrapple is an *inexpensive* meal.
3. Kevin's interest in model cars has turned into a *hobby*.
4. Uncle Henry lives in a *hut* deep in the woods.
5. Phileas Fogg was an *adventurous* traveler.
6. We stopped for lunch at a *diner* in West Virginia.
7. My parents are committed *conservationists*.
8. My *old* laptop has finally died.
9. In a quiet and *stealthy* way, Bartleby moved into the lawyer's chambers.
10. The teacher was mildly intimidated by Merdine's *assertive* behavior.
11. Sometimes my *thin* friend annoys me.

Diction's Activity

Diction Label each sentence as formal, casual, or slang based on its diction.

- Let's go get some dinner.
- It is vital to understand the text one reads.
- Computers are a pain in the neck.
- The Mona Lisa looks weird from up close.
- Pickett's charge at the Battle of Gettysburg was surely an awe-inspiring sight.

Connotations In the following sentences choose between the words in parentheses to make the sentence have as negative a connotation as possible.

- The leader was his nation's most (notorious, well-known, famous) advocate.
- Immigrants (thronged, flocked, swarmed) to the large cities.
- A (trim, skinny, slender) woman entered the room.
- The man was (inebriated, drunk, intoxicated).
- Where did you find that (outfit, get-up, attire)?