

Denotation and Connotation

A word's **denotation** is its dictionary definition. A word can also make people feel or think a certain way. These feelings and ideas are the **connotations** of a word. Words with the same meaning can have different "shades of meaning"—that is, they can be understood differently.

Positive connotation: What a *fragrance* that perfume has! That's quite an aroma. (a pleasant, appealing smell)

Neutral connotation: What a *smell* that perfume has!

Negative connotation: What a *stink* that perfume has! That's quite a *stench*. (an unpleasant, disgusting smell)

Be sure that the words you use have the right connotation as well as the right denotation.

A. Identifying Positive and Negative Connotations

Each pair of phrases includes synonyms with different connotations. Put a + sign next to the one with a positive connotation and a - sign next to the one with a negative connotation. Use a dictionary or thesaurus if needed.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. an aggressive athlete _____ | 6. pampered his pets _____ |
| a pushy athlete _____ | coddled his pets _____ |
| 2. an arrogant statement _____ | 7. an overprotective mother _____ |
| a confident statement _____ | a cautious mother _____ |
| 3. known for her cleverness _____ | 8. a colorful sweater _____ |
| known for her cunning _____ | a gaudy sweater _____ |
| 4. a slender dancer _____ | 9. showed persistence _____ |
| a scrawny dancer _____ | showed stubbornness _____ |
| 5. a rowdy crowd _____ | 10. spent time making small talk _____ |
| a lively crowd _____ | spent time chattering _____ |

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B. Connotations in Action

You are an advertising copywriter for a travel agency. Circle the words and phrases in the paragraph that have a positive connotation. Use a dictionary or thesaurus if needed.

Come to Utopia Island!

We want you to visit our (boring, tranquil) island and its (unchanging, monotonous) beaches. When you arrive, hotel staffers in (exotic, bizarre) costumes will bring you (aromatic, stinky) foods that are native to the region. Visit our marketplaces to (invest your money in, squander your money on) our famous (trinkets, collectibles). You are welcome to wear (casual, sloppy) clothes during the day. If you wish, you may change into (fussier, more elaborate) clothing at night. All this fun can be yours for an (affordable, cheap) price. Ask your travel agent today why Utopia Island is the most (popular, commonplace) vacation destination in the world!

C. Vocabulary Challenge

Replace each word with a synonym that has a positive connotation. Then write a sentence using the synonym correctly. Use a dictionary or thesaurus if needed.

1. reckless _____

2. flashy _____

3. show-off _____

4. slick _____

5. know-it-all _____

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