

When you write a letter to a friend or call an acquaintance on the telephone, the casual language that you use suits the informality of the situation. On the other hand, when you write a job application letter or prepare a speech for a debate, you choose words, sentence structures, and expressions that are much more formal. The occasion dictates your manner of writing or speaking.

Levels of language are only one area of a fascinating subject, however. In this lesson you will learn words that introduce you to wide-ranging aspects of language and help you to become an informed user of English.

WORD LIST

archaic
argot
connotation
denotation
idiom
jargon
semantics
slang
standard
vernacular

DEFINITIONS

After you have studied the definitions and example for each vocabulary word, write the word on the line to the right.

1. **archaic** (är-kä'ik) *adjective* a. Referring to words and language that were once common but are now rarely used. b. Ancient. c. No longer applicable: *archaic laws*. (From the Greek word *arkhaikos*, meaning "old-fashioned")

Example Many historical documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, contain *archaic* words.

2. **argot** (är'gō, är'gət) *noun* The informal vocabulary used by a particular class or group, such as criminals; a secret language. (From the French word *argot*, meaning "slang")

Example *The Beggar's Opera*, a humorous play written in the 1700s, is rich in thieves' *argot*.

3. **connotation** (kōn'ə-tā'shən) *noun* The mental connections or associations suggested by a word that go beyond its literal meaning or its dictionary definition.

Related Words *connotative adjective; connote verb*

Example The word *crowd* has a more favorable *connotation* than the word *mob*.

4. **denotation** (dē'nō-tā'shən) *noun* The exact meaning of a word. (From the Latin word *denotare*, meaning "to specify")

Related Words *denotative adjective; denote verb*

Example The word *nice* usually has the *denotation* of "attractive" or "pleasant," but it can also have the connotation of "fussy" or "finicky."

1. _____

2. _____

See *jargon*.

3. _____

See *denotation*.

4. _____

MEMORY CUE:

Denotation means "the exact dictionary definition," and *connotation* means "the ideas and feelings connected with a word."

5. **idiom** (id'ē-əm) *noun* **a.** An expression having a special meaning that is not clear from the usual meaning of the individual words in the expression. **b.** The specific grammatical and structural characteristics of a language; the accepted pattern of word usage. **c.** Speech that is characteristic of a particular region. (From the Greek word *idios*, meaning "one's own")

Related Words *idiomatic adjective; idiomatically adverb*

Example The *idiom* "to have an ax to grind" refers to having a selfish aim or motive.

6. **jargon** (jār'gən) *noun* **a.** The specialized technical vocabulary used by people in the same profession or field. **b.** Confusing, meaningless talk.

Example The patient asked the doctor to explain what she meant without using confusing medical *jargon*.

7. **semantics** (sī-măn'tiks) *noun* **a.** The study of historical changes in the meanings of words. **b.** The study of the relation of words to the objects they stand for. (From the Greek word *sēma*, meaning "sign")

Related Words *semantic adjective; semantically adverb; semanticist noun*

Example Thelma, who is fascinated by *semantics*, told us that the word *silly* once meant "holy."

8. **slang** (släng) *noun* Highly informal language that occurs most often in casual conversation.

Example When Ned described Robinson Crusoe as a "together person," Mr. Cummings asked him to express the same idea without using *slang*.

9. **standard** (stăn'dərd) *adjective* **a.** Conforming to established usage in speech or writing. **b.** Commonly used and accepted as an authority. *noun* **a.** A rule or model used to judge the quality or correctness of something; criterion. **b.** A level of requirement, excellence, or attainment. (From the Old French word *estandard*, meaning "a rallying place")

Related Word *standardize verb*

Example Correct use of *standard* English requires an understanding of grammar and usage.

10. **vernacular** (vər-nāk'yə-lər) *noun* The normal spoken language of a country or region as distinct from the literary or learned language; everyday speech. *adjective* Native to or commonly spoken by residents of a particular country or region. (From the Latin word *vernaculus*, meaning "of home-born slaves")

Example Mark Twain is well known for his use of Southern *vernacular* in his writing.

5. _____

6. _____

USAGE NOTE: *Jargon* refers to a specialized vocabulary. *Argot* is jargon used for secret communication.

7. _____

USAGE NOTE: The word *semantics* is always used with a singular verb.

8. _____

See *vernacular*.

9. _____

10. _____

USAGE NOTE: The *vernacular* is the everyday speech of the general population. Within the vernacular is *slang*, which is specific to groups within the general population (such as teenagers) and is short-lived in its use.

EXERCISE 1 WRITING CORRECT WORDS

On the answer line, write the word from the vocabulary list that fits each definition.

1. An expression having a meaning different from the meaning of the individual words in it 1. _____
2. The secret language used by a particular group or class 2. _____
3. The mental associations suggested by a word 3. _____
4. The study of changes in the meanings of words 4. _____
5. The everyday spoken language of a country or region 5. _____
6. The technical vocabulary of those in the same occupation or field 6. _____
7. The exact meaning of a word 7. _____
8. Highly informal language 8. _____
9. Referring to formerly common words that are now rarely used 9. _____
10. Conforming to established usage in speech or writing 10. _____

EXERCISE 2 USING WORDS CORRECTLY

Each of the following questions contains an italicized vocabulary word. Choose the correct answer to the question, and write *Yes* or *No* on the answer line.

1. Are the *connotations* of the word *inexpensive* more favorable than the connotations of the word *cheap*? 1. _____
2. Is a *hit* the same thing in the *jargons* of baseball and football? 2. _____
3. If you want to make a good impression at a job interview, will you use *slang*? 3. _____
4. Might two spies use *argot* so that others could not understand them? 4. _____
5. Is the *denotation* of a word its range of suggested meanings? 5. _____
6. Does *semantics* deal with the alterations of meanings in a language? 6. _____
7. Would you expect a scholarly book to be written in the *vernacular*? 7. _____
8. Do newspapers contain many *archaic* terms? 8. _____
9. Is "down in the dumps" an *idiom*? 9. _____
10. In a term paper, would you use *standard* English? 10. _____

EXERCISE 3 CHOOSING THE BEST WORD

Decide which vocabulary word or related form best completes the sentence, and write the letter of your choice on the answer line.

1. If your teacher asks for the _____ of a word, he or she wants you to furnish an exact definition. 1. _____
 a. semantics b. idiom c. connotation d. denotation

2. Many dictionaries contain words that are no longer used, but they are labeled as _____.
a. connotative b. vernacular c. archaic d. standard
3. The jury could not understand the testimony of the jockey because he used so much _____.
a. argot b. idiom c. connotation d. vernacular
4. If Lucy had followed _____ rules of punctuation, her letter would have been easier to understand.
a. vernacular b. standard c. archaic d. connotative
5. The novelist captured the _____ of the mountain people.
a. connotation b. semantics c. jargon d. vernacular
6. *Thin* and *scrawny* mean the same, but each has a different _____.
a. idiom b. connotation c. argot d. semantic
7. Compiling a dictionary of current _____ is difficult because most of the terms are used only a short time.
a. slang b. denotation c. semantics d. connotation
8. Saying that someone is going to "hit the roof" is one of several _____ that people use to describe an angry reaction.
a. semantics b. connotations c. idioms d. jargons
9. The study of _____ has proven that language undergoes gradual change.
a. idioms b. connotation c. argot d. semantics
10. The _____ of computer experts is often difficult for people outside the field to understand.
a. slang b. vernacular c. denotation d. jargon

EXERCISE 4 USING DIFFERENT FORMS OF WORDS

Decide which form of the vocabulary word in parentheses best completes the sentence. The form given may be correct. Write your answer on the answer line.

1. Pam used less _____ as she got older. (*slang*)
2. To appreciate _____ speech, one must hear it spoken by a native. (*vernacular*)
3. *Thy* is an _____ pronoun. (*archaic*)
4. The _____ of *argument* and *quarrel* are almost the same. (*denotation*)
5. Although Gretchen does well on _____ tests, she always gets nervous before taking them. (*standard*)
6. Dale is sensitive to the _____ aspects of language. (*connotation*)
7. _____ expressions cannot be understood from the meanings of the individual words. (*Idiom*)
8. Sometimes people will disagree about wording when there is really only a small _____ difference. (*semantics*)
9. When used for a general audience, _____ can be confusing and meaningless. (*jargon*)
10. Michael could not understand the _____ of the prisoners. (*argot*)