

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-kā'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 c. No longer applicable: *archaic laws*.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**Example** Many historical documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, contain *archaic* words.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'göt) *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** (sĭ-măn'tĭks) *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** (stän'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-näk'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.