

CHAPTER TWELVE



The Dictionary

MEANINGS OF WORDS

A word is appropriate when it suits your topic, your purpose in writing, and your audience. For example, if you are talking with a friend, you might say, “That guy’s a real chocoholic.” But, if you are writing for a general audience in an assignment for a class, you would probably say, “Eric takes every opportunity he can to eat chocolate.” In each case, the word choices suit the occasion.

The dictionary is one of your best resources in choosing appropriate words. In fact, dictionaries include two categories of information especially important to writers: meanings and restrictive labels.

You know how to look up the meaning of a word, but determining which meaning is the most useful to you as a reader and a writer takes a little more patience. Look at the meanings of *store* taken from Webster’s *New World Dictionary*:

store (stôr) *vt.* **stored, stor’ing** [ME *storen* < OFr *estorer*, to erect, furnish, store < L *instaurare*, to repair, restore, erect < *in-*, IN-¹ + *-staurare* < IE base **stā-*, to STAND] **1** to put aside, or accumulate, for use when needed **2** to fill or furnish with a supply or stock [a mind *stored* with trivia] **3** to put, as in a warehouse, for safekeeping **4** to be a place for the storage of **5** to put or keep (information) in a computer memory—*vi.* to undergo storage in a specified manner—*n.* [ME < OFr *estor* < the *v.*] **1** a supply (of something) for use when needed; reserve; stock **2** [*pl.*] supplies, esp. of food, clothing, arms, etc. ***3** a retail establishment where goods are regularly offered for sale **4** a place where supplies are kept; storhouse; warehouse **5** a great amount or number; abundance—*adj.* of a kind sold in stores; being a commercial or mass-produced article—**in store** set aside for, or awaiting one in, the future; in reserve or in prospect—***mind the store** to tend to business—**set** (or **put** or **lay**) **store by** to have regard or esteem for; value—**stor’able** *adj.*

You should skim all the meanings given for a word to find the one best suited to your purpose.



EXERCISE 1 ▶ Each sentence contains the word *store*. In the preceding dictionary entry, find the definition that provides the meaning used in each sentence. Write that definition in the space.

Example: We will store the wood until we need it this winter.

to put aside, or accumulate, for use when needed

1. You will need to store the information in the computer’s memory.

2. The shelves are stored with old and rare books.

3. The appliance store is having a sale on refrigerators.

4. We can store the merchandise in the warehouse for a month.

5. The pharmacy keeps a store of betadine on hand.



EXERCISE 2 Find the word *run* in your dictionary. Using ten different meanings of the word, write ten sentences.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

RESTRICTIVE LABELS

The dictionary uses restrictive labels to indicate that a word's use is restricted or limited. You will notice three types of labels in your dictionary:

1. A subject label indicates that a word has special meaning when used in a particular field.
Example: *zool.* for *zoology*
2. A geographic label indicates that word is used in a certain geographical region.
Example: *arroyo* in the Southwest
3. A usage label indicates when it is appropriate to use a word.

Usage labels are most important for you as a writer. One common label is *nonstandard* or *substandard*. Standard English includes the words that educated writers and readers usually expect. Nonstandard English includes words that are not acceptable in or appropriate for standard written English.

Many intelligent people use nonstandard English; in fact, it is the natural speech in many homes. Included in nonstandard English are words like *ain't*, *hissel*, *knowed*, *nowheres*. Of course, many nonstandard words and phrases are not in the dictionary; those that are in the dictionary are labeled. Consequently, if you look up *knowed* and it is not in the dictionary, you should not use it in a paper you are writing for a college class. If you look up *ain't*, it will probably be in the dictionary and labeled as *nonstandard* or *substandard*. Therefore, you should not use it in your writing.

Even though no absolute rules distinguish standard and nonstandard English, dictionaries and textbooks can help you in choosing appropriate words. You should consider the guidelines in these books, and, of course, consider your purpose in writing and the needs of your audience.



EXERCISE 1 ▶ Each of the following sentences contains a nonstandard word or phrase. Rewrite each sentence with a standard word or phrase.

Example: They *knowed* the route to the canyon.

They knew the route to the canyon.

1. He painted the house *hissel*.

2. The solution will be found *irregardless* of the time we have to spend.

3. She *ain't* the one who drove me to work.

4. The team was pleased with *theirsself* after they won the tournament.

5. My brother's son *growed* at least two inches since March.

Other frequently used labels include the following:

1. *Informal* or *colloquial* applies to words generally used in conversations and words acceptable in everyday speech.

Example: The news did not *faze* me at all. (Formal usage would require the word *disturb*.)

2. *Slang* refers to words used in extremely informal situations. A slang word is usually used by a particular group of people and only for a limited period of time.

Example: He was smoking *pot* when I saw him last night. (Formal usage would require the word *marijuana*.)

3. *Vulgar* refers to words that are not acceptable in writing or conversation because they are offensive.

Example: Your explanation is *crap*. (Formal usage would require the word *worthless*.)

4. *Obsolete* refers to words with a meaning that is no longer used. For example, the word *nice* used to mean *foolish*.
5. *Archaic* refers to words that were commonly used long ago but are not used at all now. For example, the word *kind* used to mean *cattle*.



EXERCISE 2 ▶ Look in the dictionary for each of the italicized words in the following sentences. How is each word labeled: *informal*, *colloquial*, *slang*, *vulgar*, *obsolete*, or *archaic*?

Example: The old man is *dotty*.

Informal

1. It was no *sweat* to complete the assignment.
-

2. We are *kindred* in many of our qualities.
-

3. The teacher gave us several *pointers* in solving the equation.
-

4. The young man is *curious* in dress and manner.
-

5. I would *fain* give you all I possess.
-

6. He looks like a *slob*.
-

CONNOTATIONS

The dictionary is also a valuable resource in helping you choose the most precise word to express your thoughts and feelings. Look at the following list of words:

thin
slender
skinny
svelte
slim

Thin is the neutral word in the list; this strict dictionary meaning of a word is called the *denotation*. However, in writing, you do not always want a neutral word, so you use words with certain associations; these meanings are called *connotations*. For example, *slender* carries a pleasing connotation while *skinny* suggests an unpleasant connotation. *Svelte* implies gracefulness, another positive connotation, while *slim* can have a slightly negative connotation.

Choosing a word with the right connotation for your purpose and audience is an excellent skill to learn. Many dictionaries will explain the connotations of certain words. If not, you can still read the definitions and compare words to choose the right word for your writing situation.



EXERCISE 1 ► In each group of words, circle the most neutral. Use a dictionary to look up the words if you need to.

1. expensive
valuable
high-priced
costly
dear

2. sturdy
stout
strong
tough
intense

3. diligent
busy
relentless
driven

4. cop
police
law officer

5. fired
non-retained
dismissed

6. faithful
loyal
servile

7. curious
obsessed
interested
captivated
enthralled

8. joyous
happy
ecstatic
cheerful
glad



EXERCISE 2 ► For each of the following neutral words, substitute a word with connotations you would like to convey. Then write a sentence using the word you have chosen.

Example: house *shack*—*The dilapidated shack was a home to the young child.*

1. person _____

2. talk _____

3. run _____

4. old _____

5. child _____

6. unusual _____

7. actor _____

8. eat _____

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Nonsexist Language

Our traditional language usage includes sexist patterns that should be avoided. Sexist language either belittles people because of their sex, identifies one sex with the entire human race, or makes sexual distinctions that are inappropriate. You should strive to use nonsexist language, a language that implies equal value and potential for people of either sex.

NONSEXIST LANGUAGE

<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Use</i>
<hr/> <i>People in General</i> <hr/>	
The driver should check his rearview mirror.	Drivers should check their rearview mirrors. A driver should check his or her rearview mirror.
Any man who wants to succeed needs to take this course.	Anyone who wants to succeed needs to take this course.
man-made	manufactured, synthetic, artificial
mankind	humanity, people, human beings, the human race
<hr/> <i>Occupational Titles</i> <hr/>	
fireman	firefighter
policeman	police officer
salesman	salesperson
businessman	businessperson, executive, manager
mailman	postal worker, letter carrier, mail carrier
foreman	supervisor
lady doctor	doctor
male nurse	nurse
female lawyer	lawyer
poet, poetess	poet
steward, stewardess	flight attendant
<hr/> <i>References to Women</i> <hr/>	
girl (secretary, receptionist)	secretary, receptionist
career girl	career person, professional woman
better half	wife, spouse
Use Ms. as a form of address when a woman's marital status is unknown or irrelevant. If the woman prefers Mrs. or Miss, use it.	

continued

NONSEXIST LANGUAGE, CONTINUED

Avoid	Use
<i>Salutation of Business Letter to Someone You Do Not Know</i>	
Dear Sir: Gentlemen:	Dear Madam or Sir: (Use position) Dear Personnel Officer:
<i>Relationships</i>	
They are man and wife. The men and ladies applauded. Jim and Miss Welch Mr. Jack Hawkins and Mrs. Jack Hawkins	They are husband and wife. The men and women applauded. Jim and Carol Mr. Jack Hawkins and Mrs. Sue Hawkins
<i>Male and Female Workers</i>	
steward, stewardess poet, poetess policeman, policewoman	flight attendant poet police officer
<i>Portrayal of the Sexes in News Stories, Speeches, and so on</i>	
Julie Berry, wife of Dr. Michael Berry, received the award for her work as an orthopedist. Carla Richards, grandmother of six, underwrote the Friends of the Library Project.	Dr. Julie Berry received the award for her work as an orthopedist. Carla Richards underwrote the Friends of the Library Project.



EXERCISE 1 ► Rewrite the following sentences, eliminating any sexist language.

Example: Each student must leave his books with the monitor while he takes the test.

Each student must leave his or her books with the monitor while he or she takes the test.

Or

Students must leave their books with the monitor while they take their tests.

1. The Downey family met with an insurance man to review a new policy.

2. The IBM computer is a necessity for any man in business.

3. The first ones to walk through the entry were Frank and Miss Keller.

4. Emily Dickinson, the poetess, and Ayn Rand, the authoress, are two important woman in literary history.

5. Janet, the businesswoman, is in the marketing department.

6. Competition has both positive and negative effects on mankind.

7. How many man-hours does the job require?

8. She is a coed at the local junior college.

9. Everyone should submit his application by the first Monday in April.



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