



## USING AND OVERUSING THE THESAURUS

When you use a dictionary, you usually know at least a little bit about the word you are looking up. With a thesaurus, you usually know a general definition but need to find a specific word that will fit the topic and context about which you are writing. Be sure to review all the synonyms that are offered as a substitute for the general word you look up; you need to consider the synonyms in the context of your essay or writing, and then choose the one that fits.

### Helpful hint

The thesaurus that came with your word processor may be helpful, but just clicking on the first synonym it offers may harm, rather than help, your writing. Use a thesaurus in conjunction with a dictionary, and you will be able to correctly choose the appropriate word for the context.

## Sign

Main Entry *sign*

When using a thesaurus, find the **ENTRY** and **DEFINITION** before you look at the synonyms. On this page, there are two noun entries.

Part of Speech: *noun*

Part of speech

Definition: *indication, evidence*

Definition

Synonyms: *assurance, augury, auspice, badge, beacon, bell, caution, clue, divination, flag, foreknowledge, foreshadowing, forewarning, gesture, giveaway, handwriting on wall, herald, hint, light, manifestation, mark, nod, note, omen, precursor, prediction, premonition, presage, proof, signal, suggestion, symbol, symptom, token, trace, vestige, warning, wave, whistle, wink*

Main Entry *sign*

Use synonyms that are already familiar to you, or be sure to look them up in a dictionary to use them appropriately.

Part of Speech: *noun*

Noun usage with a different definition

Definition: *document with information; symbol*

Synonyms: *badge, board, character, cipher, crest, device, emblem, ensign, guidepost, insignia, logo, mark, notice, placard, proof, representation, signboard, signpost*

Part of Speech: *verb*

Verb usage

Definition: *write name*

Synonyms: *acknowledge, authorize, autograph, confirm, endorse, initial, ink, inscribe, put John Hancock on, put John Henry on, set one's hand to, signature, witness*

Phrasal synonyms

Part of Speech: *verb*

Definition: *motion to another*

Synonyms: *beckon, express, flag, gesticulate, gesture, indicate, motion, signal, signalize, signify, use sign language, wave*

Part of Speech: *noun, verb*

Be sure to know the full definition and appropriate context for an unfamiliar word before using it

Related Adjectives: *armorial, characteristic, connotative, curiological, demonstrative, diagnostic, emblematic, indelible, indicated, indicating, indicative, indicatory, individual, jolloped, known by, marked, pantomimic, pathognomonic, pointed, recognizable by, representative, symbolic, symptomatic, typical*

## EXERCISE 1

*Directions: This student apparently overused the thesaurus as he was writing this letter to his instructor. See if you can help him out by replacing inappropriate words with more appropriate ones.*

Dear Professor Walker,

I'm very sorry that I was absent for the eighth time this semester. As I was driving back to school yesterday (I'm from out of state), I missed my egress off the interstate because a tempest had blown down several road signs, including the one directing me to university grounds. Since I'm novel to the area, I didn't apprehend that I had missed anything until I had driven three hours out of my way. By the time I figured out that something was erroneous, it was late at night and I was too weary to continue driving. I called home to ask what I should do, and my patriarch told me to discontinue for the night and find my way back in the morning, causing me to miss your 8:00 a.m. Monday class. I'm sure you'll concur that my safety was much more momentous than your English class, so I'll assume that you will not castigate me for another absence. Also, I was hoping I might have an extension on the essay that was due on Monday; I was planning to write it Sunday night when I got back to my dorm, but obviously I was at the hotel and stressed out. I did, however, inscribe a letter to the Tennessee Department of Transportation expressing my frustration over their neglect to replace the missing signs, which I'll be happy to show you as attestation of the incident. Thank you for understanding, and I promise I'll be in class for the residual ten weeks of the semester.

Sincerely,

Dan Johnson

