

Connotation: Shades of Meaning

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 10



Quick Review

Denotation is a word's exact dictionary meaning. **Connotation** is the FEELING the word adds — positive, neutral, or negative. Words can be near-synonyms and still send very different signals. *Slim* (positive), *thin* (neutral), and *skinny* (mildly negative) all describe a narrow body, but they don't feel the same. The same is true for *look / gaze / stare / gawk*, *group / crowd / mob*, *talk / chat / chatter / babble*, *young / youthful / childish / immature*, and *old / elderly / antiquated / ancient*. Match the connotation to the tone the writer wants.

PRACTICE

Choose the word with the BEST connotation for each sentence, or identify the connotation a word carries.

1. Read the sentence: *Marisol gave a warm, hopeful speech and smiled at every member of the audience.*

Which word BEST replaces the underlined word to keep a POSITIVE tone?

The audience was a noisy _____ by the end of the speech.

- A. mob
- B. gang
- C. horde
- D. crowd

2. Which word in the list has the MOST NEGATIVE connotation?

- A. thin
- B. scrawny
- C. slim
- D. slender

3. Read the sentence: *The reporter wrote that the protesters _____ peacefully outside the city hall for two hours.*

Which word fits a NEUTRAL, fair news report?

- A. rioted
- B. swarmed
- C. gathered
- D. stormed



4. Two writers describe the same person who looks at a painting for a long time. Which sentence suggests PRAISE?
- A. Lucia **gazed** at the painting for a long time, taking in every color and brushstroke.
 - B. Lucia **gawked** at the painting for a long time, mouth open.
 - C. Lucia **stared** at the painting for a long time, expressionless.
 - D. Lucia **peered** at the painting for a long time, squinting hard.
5. Which word has the MOST POSITIVE connotation when describing an elderly relative?
- A. ancient
 - B. antiquated
 - C. elderly
 - D. decrepit
6. Read the sentence: *During the long car ride, Mateo's little cousins _____ nonstop about superheroes.*
Which word adds a slightly NEGATIVE connotation that suggests the talk became annoying?
- A. discussed
 - B. chattered
 - C. spoke
 - D. talked
7. Two sentences describe the same actor. Which one uses connotation to suggest CRITICISM?
- A. Dev's performance was bold and inventive.
 - B. Dev's performance was confident and unique.
 - C. Dev's performance was original and daring.
 - D. Dev's performance was loud and odd.
8. Which sentence uses connotation to suggest that the children behaved POSITIVELY?
- A. The **youthful** energy of the third-graders filled the auditorium.
 - B. The **childish** energy of the third-graders filled the auditorium.
 - C. The **immature** energy of the third-graders filled the auditorium.
 - D. The **infantile** energy of the third-graders filled the auditorium.
9. Read the sentence: *Ms. Park is thrifty with her money.*
(a) Is the connotation of **thrifty** positive, neutral, or negative? (b) Name TWO near-synonyms — one that would make the sentence sound more critical and one that would keep it positive. (c) Explain in 1–2 sentences how a writer's word choice changes how the reader feels about Ms. Park.



10. Read the two sentences:

1) *A determined reporter pressed the senator with hard questions.*

2) *A pushy reporter badgered the senator with hard questions.*

(a) Both sentences describe the same behavior. Which one praises the reporter? Which one criticizes?

(b) Identify TWO specific word choices that create the different tones and explain what each one connotes.



Answer Keys

- 1 A B C D
- 2 A B C D
- 3 A B C D
- 4 A B C D
- 5 A B C D

- 6 A B C D
- 7 A B C D
- 8 A B C D
- 9
- 10

Explanations


1. D	Crowd is a neutral-to-positive word for a large group — it fits Marisol's warm and hopeful speech. A mob is large AND uncontrolled, with a negative connotation (riots, anger). B gang suggests criminality. C horde suggests a threatening or invading group. All four denote a <i>large group of people</i> , but only D fits the warm tone of the passage.
2. B	Scrawny suggests <i>thin in an unhealthy or unattractive way</i> — clearly negative. A <i>thin</i> is roughly neutral. C <i>slim</i> is mildly positive (associated with fitness). D <i>slender</i> is positive (often complimentary). All four share the denotation <i>narrow in body</i> , but their connotations span the full positive–negative scale.
3. C	Gathered is neutral and fair — the right tone for impartial news. A <i>rioted</i> implies violence and contradicts <i>peacefully</i> . B <i>swarmed</i> compares people to insects, a negative image. D <i>stormed</i> suggests forceful, angry action. Only C matches both the literal facts and the neutral tone the reporter wants.
4. A	Gazed connotes thoughtful, admiring attention — praise for the way Lucia engages with the painting. B <i>gawked</i> connotes dumb staring (negative). C <i>stared</i> is more neutral but feels blank or rude. D <i>peered</i> suggests trouble seeing, not admiration. All four mean <i>looked for a long time</i> but only A fits a praising tone.
5. C	Elderly is the respectful word for older people — positive. A <i>ancient</i> exaggerates and sounds rude when applied to a person. B <i>antiquated</i> usually applies to objects or ideas (an antiquated computer); for people it sounds harsh and out-of-date. D <i>decrepit</i> suggests worn-out and broken-down — deeply negative. All four denote <i>old</i> in some way; only C is respectful.
6. B	Chattered connotes <i>quick, nonstop, light talk</i> — mildly negative, suggesting Mateo found it tiring. A <i>discussed</i> is formal and neutral; it doesn't show annoyance. C <i>spoke</i> and D <i>talked</i> are neutral. All four denote <i>used words</i> , but only B carries the edge of annoyance that fits a long car ride.
7. D	D uses <i>loud</i> (often negative for performance) and <i>odd</i> (negative for unusual) — criticism in disguise. A, B, and C describe the SAME qualities with positive synonyms (<i>bold, confident, original, inventive, unique, daring</i>). This is how writers can praise or criticize while reporting the same facts.
8. A	Youthful is positive — it suggests fresh, lively energy. B <i>childish</i> is negative when used for energy (silly, immature). C <i>immature</i> is openly negative (not grown up enough). D <i>infantile</i> is the strongest criticism (acting like a baby). All four denote <i>young</i> , but only A casts the children positively.



9.	Answer: (a) Thrifty has a positive connotation — it suggests careful, wise use of money. (b) A more critical near-synonym is <i>stingy</i> (or <i>cheap</i> , <i>miserly</i>); a positive near-synonym is <i>frugal</i> or <i>economical</i> . (c) Calling Ms. Park <i>thrifty</i> or <i>frugal</i> makes the reader admire her self-control, while calling her <i>stingy</i> or <i>cheap</i> makes the reader see her as selfish — even though all the words describe the SAME behavior.
10.	Answer: (a) Sentence 1 praises the reporter; sentence 2 criticizes the reporter. (b) Determined (positive: strong-willed, focused) vs. pushy (negative: rudely aggressive). Pressed (neutral-to-positive: applied steady pressure to get answers) vs. badgered (negative: nagged or harassed repeatedly). The denotations overlap, but the connotations push the reader toward opposite judgments.



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