

# Connotation and Denotation

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. Two words can share a denotation and still send opposite signals: *thrifty / frugal* (positive), *economical* (neutral), *cheap / miserly / stingy* (negative); *determined* (positive), *stubborn* (mildly negative), *obstinate* (negative); *assertive* (positive), *bossy / aggressive* (negative); *slim / slender* (positive), *thin* (neutral), *skinny / scrawny* (negative); *look / gaze* (positive), *stare* (neutral), *gawk* (negative); *young / youthful* (positive), *childish / immature* (negative). Pick the connotation that matches the writer's tone — praise, criticism, or neutral report.

## 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 when describing a person's spending habits?

- A. thrifty
- B. miserly
- C. frugal
- D. economical

3. Read the sentence: *The reporter wrote that the protesters \_\_\_\_\_ peacefully outside 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 student who keeps asking the teacher questions. Which sentence suggests PRAISE?
- A. Diego was **inquisitive**, raising thoughtful questions after every example.
  - B. Diego was **nosy**, raising questions after every example.
  - C. Diego was **pestering**, raising questions after every example.
  - D. Diego was **meddlesome**, raising questions after every example.
5. Which word has the MOST POSITIVE connotation when describing a student's drive to succeed?
- A. obstinate
  - B. stubborn
  - C. determined
  - D. pigheaded
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 weird.
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 assertive in every staff meeting.*  
(a) Is the connotation of **assertive** 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.

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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.

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## 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

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| <b>1. D</b> | <b>Crowd</b> is neutral-to-positive for a large group — it fits Marisol's warm and hopeful tone. A <b>mob</b> is large AND uncontrolled, with a negative connotation (riots, anger). B <b>gang</b> suggests criminality. C <b>horde</b> suggests a threatening or invading group. All four denote a <i>large group of people</i> , but only D fits the warm tone.  |
| <b>2. B</b> | <b>Miserly</b> means <i>refusing to spend even when it would help others</i> — clearly negative, the spending equivalent of cruel. A <b>thrifty</b> is positive (careful with money). C <b>frugal</b> is positive (sparing, wise). D <b>economical</b> is neutral-to-positive (efficient use of resources). All four share the denotation <i>not spending freely</i> , but they span the full positive-negative scale. |
| <b>3. C</b> | <b>Gathered</b> is neutral and fair — the right tone for impartial news. A <b>rioted</b> implies violence and contradicts <i>peacefully</i> . B <b>swarmed</b> compares people to insects, a negative image. D <b>stormed</b> suggests forceful, angry action. Only C matches the literal facts AND the neutral tone.  |
| <b>4. A</b> | <b>Inquisitive</b> connotes intellectually curious — praise for a student's engagement. B <b>nosy</b> connotes prying into others' business (negative). C <b>pestering</b> connotes annoying repeated bother (negative). D <b>meddlesome</b> connotes interfering where one shouldn't (negative). All four denote <i>asking many questions</i> but only A casts the behavior in a praising light.                      |
| <b>5. C</b> | <b>Determined</b> is positive — it suggests focused, admirable drive. A <b>obstinate</b> connotes refusing to listen (negative). B <b>stubborn</b> is mildly negative (refusing to change). D <b>pigheaded</b> is strongly negative (foolishly inflexible). All four share the denotation <i>not giving up</i> , but only C is praise.   |
| <b>6. B</b> | <b>Chattered</b> connotes <i>quick, nonstop, light talk</i> — mildly negative, suggesting Mateo found it tiring. A <b>discussed</b> is formal and neutral. C <b>spoke</b> and D <b>talked</b> are also neutral. All four denote <i>used words</i> , but only B carries the edge of annoyance that fits a long car ride.  |
| <b>7. D</b> | <b>D</b> uses <b>loud</b> (often negative for performance) and <b>weird</b> (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> ). Same facts, opposite tone — the connotation does the work.   |
| <b>8. A</b> | <b>Youthful</b> is positive — it suggests fresh, lively energy. B <b>childish</b> is negative when used for energy (silly, immature). C <b>immature</b> is openly negative (not grown up enough). D <b>infantile</b> is the strongest criticism (acting like a baby). All four denote <i>young</i> , but only A casts the children positively.   |



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| 9.  | <p><b>Answer:</b> (a) <b>Assertive</b> has a <b>positive</b> connotation &amp;mdash; it suggests confident, clear, respectful expression of one's views. (b) A more critical near-synonym is <i>bossy</i> (or <i>aggressive</i>, <i>pushy</i>); a positive near-synonym is <i>confident</i> or <i>self-possessed</i>. (c) Calling Ms. Park <i>assertive</i> or <i>confident</i> makes the reader admire her leadership, while calling her <i>bossy</i> or <i>aggressive</i> makes the reader see her as rude &amp;mdash; even though all the words describe the same behavior.</p> |
| 10. | <p><b>Answer:</b> (a) Sentence 1 <b>praises</b> the reporter; sentence 2 <b>criticizes</b> the reporter. (b) <b>Determined</b> (positive: strong-willed, focused) vs. <b>pushy</b> (negative: rudely aggressive). <b>Pressed</b> (neutral-to-positive: applied steady pressure to get answers) vs. <b>badgered</b> (negative: nagged or harassed repeatedly). The denotations overlap, but the connotations push the reader toward opposite judgments.</p>   |




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