

Dictionary Learning Packet:

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Usage Review

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Etymology/Word Origins

ACADEMIC SUPPORT CENTER LEARNING PACKAGE

USING THE DICTIONARY I: USAGE LABELS

In most composition courses, instructors explain varieties of language and appropriate usage. The following design is often used to illustrate varieties of language:

STANDARD ENGLISH			NON-STANDARD ENGLISH
FORMAL	GENERAL	INFORMAL	COLLOQUIAL, DIALECT, SLANG
Comprehend	Understand	Get	Dig

For most college writing, you will be expected to use formal or general English to avoid archaic (words now considered to be old fashioned), non-standard, and informal usage, and to select words which convey precise meanings. Dictionaries can be useful reference books to help you determine the appropriateness of a word.

Most dictionaries do not offer usage labels for general and formal usage. Instead, they identify informal or slang expressions, archaic expressions, and nonstandard (sometimes labeled as dialect or colloquial) expressions. The way in which a word is used determines its usage label. For example, the word *dig* is not necessarily slang. It is identified as slang when it is used to mean understand. An example of a dictionary definition follows:

dig: /dig/vb dug/dig-ging/ME diggen/ vi 1: to turn up, loosen, or remove earth: DELVE 2: to work hard or laboriously 3: to advance by or as if by removing or pushing aside material ~ 1a: to break up (earth) with an implement b: to turn over: PIERCE 2: to bring to the surface by digging; UNEARTH 3: to hollow out of form by removing earth; EXCAVATE 4: to drive down so as to penetrate: THRUST 5: POKE, PROD 6: slang a: to pay attention to b: UNDERSTAND, APPRECIATE

Only the last definition, 6a and 6b, is identified as slang usage.

The next example illustrates archaic usage:

understanding adj. 1 archaic: knowing intelligent 2: endowed with understanding; TOLERANT, SYMPATHETIC

Only the first definition is identified as archaic.

Often, you will recognize nonstandard usage because you have studied verb forms and sentence structures. The following examples illustrate standard and nonstandard usage:

STANDARD USAGE:

I saw a movie last night.

NONSTANDARD USAGE:

I seen a movie last night.

STANDARD USAGE:

He doesn't understand the question.

OR

He does not understand the question.

NONSTANDARD USAGE:

He don't understand the question.

STANDARD USAGE:

Regardless of the outcome, I intend to finish the race.

NONSTANDARD USAGE:

Irregardless of the outcome, I intend to finish the race.

STANDARD USAGE:

Jim should have accepted the job.

NONSTANDARD USAGE:

Jim should of accepted the job.

Although these examples of non-standard usage seem obvious, they frequently occur in student writing.

With the aid of your dictionary, classify the underlined words in the following check-test. On this sheet, mark the letter of the correct answer.

1. abide (meaning to wait for, await)
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic

2. account (n meaning reckoning, computation)
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic

3. crummy (meaning miserable, cheap, filthy)
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic

4. fink (n)
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic

5. gat (for Gatling gun)
 - A. formal or general
 - B. Slang
 - C. Archaic

6. geriatrics
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic
7. mugwump
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic
8. native (meaning closely related)
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic
9. sinister (meaning unfavorable)
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic
10. sinister (meaning evil or corruptive)
 - A. formal or general
 - B. slang
 - C. archaic

USING THE DICTIONARY II:

SYLLABICATION

DIVIDING WORDS (SYLLABICATION)

One important kind of information which dictionaries offer is the accepted form for dividing words: between syllables. Dictionaries usually indicate syllabication by showing a dot or hyphen between syllables. If you must divide a word at the end of a line, always hyphenate the word between syllables. If a word has only one syllable, do not divide that word.

EXAMPLES:

with

with • al

with • draw • al

ten • sion

con • cep • tu • al • iga • tion

con • ver • sa • tion

con • vo • ca • tion

DIRECTIONS: Use a dictionary to complete the following check-test. On the answer sheet provided, mark the letter of the answer which identifies the correct syllabication of the words listed.

1. exceptional
 - A. ex • cept • ion • al
 - B. ex • cep • tion • al
 - C. ex • cep • tion • a • l

2. holocaust
 - A. holo • caust
 - B. hol • o • caust

C. ho • lo • caust

3. communication

A. com • mu • ni • ca • tion

B. comm. • u • ni • ca • tion

C. com • mu • ni • cat • tion

4. complementary

A. comp • le • ment • ary

B. com • ple • men • ta • ry

C. comp • le • men • tar • y

5. armament

A. arm • a • ment

B. ar • mam • ent

C. ar • ma • ment

6. armadillo

A. ar • ma • dil • lo

B. arm • a • dil • lo

C. ar • ma • dill • o

7. arterial

A. ar • te • ri • al

B. ar • ter • i • al

C. ar • ter • ial

8. luxurious

A. lux • ur • i • ous

- B. lux • u • rious
 - C. lux • ur • i • ous
9. mischievous
- A. mis • chiev • ous
 - B. mis • chie • vous
10. misfortune
- A. mis • fort • une
 - B. mis • for • tune

Using the Dictionary III

Etymology or Word Origins

Having completed Parts I and II of this learning package, you are now ready to use your knowledge of word origins to select the language most appropriate for some of your specific situations. Just as body language conveys more than a single gesture, the words used in speaking and writing communicate such specifics as attitudes, tastes, and preferences.

Because the English language has borrowed extensively from other languages, there are often two, three, or four words in our language which differ only in shades of meaning. For example, the words *commence*, *begin*, and *start* have similar meanings. Which one of the three is most appropriate? For an answer to this question, the intended message, the attitudes, and the preferences must be considered. If the user of the languages wish to communicate a preference for English rather than French or Latin words, then he or she will choose *begin or start* rather than

commence. A review of the etymology of the three words illustrated some useful information:

begin [ME *beginnen*, fr. OE *beginnan* to begin, OE *onginnan*]

commence [ME *commencen*, fr. MF *commencer*, fr. (assumed) VL

comminitiare, fr. L com + LL *initiare* to begin, fr. L to initiate]

start [ME *sterren*; akin to MHG *sterzen* to stand up stiffly. move quickly, LITH *starinti* to stiffen - more to stare]

The etymology shows that the word *commence* is a borrowed word, whereas *begin* and *start* are native to the language. Most Modern American English is based on a preference for Anglo-Saxon (AS or OE) or Middle English (ME). Which of the three words in the list (*commence*, *begin*, *start*) might be preferred in American speech and writing?

Knowing a bit about history adds further clarification to the three words being considered here. In 1066, the French invaded and conquered England. As the conquerors, they established government and imposed their language upon English nobility, while the masses or Britishers continued to speak Anglo-Saxon. Anglosized French, then, became the language of the elite. Even today, many people associate elitism with French word *borrowings*. Attitudes and tastes are deeply rooted in both the verbal and non-verbal language which people use.

With the aid of your dictionary, distinguish between words which have and have not been borrowed from other languages. Mark the appropriate letter to indicate your answer.

1. speak (verb)
 - A. borrowing
 - B. not a borrowed word
2. orate (verb)
 - A. borrowed word

- B. not a borrowed word
- 3. house (noun)
 - A. borrowed word
 - B. not a borrowed word
- 4. domicile (noun)
 - A. borrowed word
 - B. not a borrowed word
- 5. respite (noun)
 - A. borrowed word
 - B. not a borrowed word
- 6. rest (noun)
 - A. borrowed word
 - B. not a borrowed word
- 7. sea (noun)
 - A. borrowed word
 - B. not a borrowed word
- 8. ocean (noun)
 - A. borrowed word
 - B. not a borrowed word
- 9. tree specialist (noun)
 - A. borrowed word
 - B. not a borrowed word
- 10. dendrologist(noun)
 - A. borrowed word

B. not a borrowed word

From each pair of words listed in this section of the test, which word would you be most likely to use in speaking, in writing? Mark your answer below

11. A. speak

B. orate

12. A. house

B. domicile

13. A. rest

B. respite

14. A. sea

B. ocean

15. A. tree specialist

B. dendrologist

16. A. dog

B. canine

17. A. cow

B. bovine

18. A. crab

B. crustacean

19. A. cat

B. feline

20. A. thoughtful

B. pensive

Clues to Word Meaning

Clue to word meanings are often found in the parts of the word: prefixes, suffixes, roots. The combination of the context clues and word-parts clues are often sufficient to determine exact meanings.

In certain academic disciplines, Latin and Greek word parts are repeatedly used. Therefore, it is often worth while for you to memorize these specific roots.

In science you will find: BIO (life), ISO (equal), MORPH (form), NEURO (nerve), VIVA (life), ASTR (star), etc.

In psychology you will find some of the above as well as MANIA (obsessive behavior), PSYCHE (mind or soul), PHOBIA (fear), GEN (born), PATH (feeling, suffering, disease), etc.

In technology you will find PHON (sound or voice), AUD (to hear), TELE (distant), GRAPH (write), CHROMA (color), LUC/LUM (light), etc.

In sociology you will find CRAC (to rule), POPLUS (people), DEMO (people), CHRON (time), etc.

In philosophy and religion you will find PHILO (love), THEO (god), CRED (to believe), GNOSIS (knowledge), FID (thrust), etc.

There are many more. Are there any in your field of interest? You'll have additional clues if you also know the following prefixes.

Prefixes

a — on, in, or toward

anti — against or opposite of

co — with or together

de — from, down, or

completely

homo — alike or same

i — not

pseudo — false or fictitious

syn-sym — with or together