This exercise will help you distinguish between the denotative and connotative meanings of [words](https://www.thoughtco.com/word-english-language-1692612). The denotative meaning of a word is the definition you'll find in the dictionary. There's not a lot of wiggle room when it comes to the interpretation of denotative words—which is why they're commonly used when it's important to ensure what you're writing or saying cannot either be misinterpreted or interpreted in more than one way, and the reason you'll often find denotative words in the language of things such as the legal documents, medical papers, scientific studies, and technical manuals (at least, the well-written ones).

A connotative word, on the other hand, may have several meanings or nuances—some positive and some negative. Connotative words are the stuff of poetry, fiction, and even advertising. Rather than bringing to mind a concise image, connotative words are used to evoke a certain atmosphere or inspire feelings.

Instructions

In each of the following sentences, the italicized word has a fairly neutral connotation. For each word in italics, list two [synonyms](https://www.thoughtco.com/synonym-definition-1692177) (words with similar denotations): one with a negative connotation and the other with a positive connotation. In addition to reviewing the glossary entries for [denotation](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-denotation-1690436) and [connotation](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-connotation-words-1689912), you may find it helpful to read the introduction to [Choosing the Best Words: Denotations and Connotations](https://www.thoughtco.com/denotations-and-connotations-1692726).

Example:

Sometimes my *thin* friend annoys me.

* **Negative connotation:** scrawny
* **Positive connotation:** slim

When you have completed the exercise, compare your answers with the sample responses that follow below.

1. I recognized the familiar *smell* of my roommate's cooking.

**Negative connotation:** odor

**Positive connotation:** fragrance

1. Scrapple is an *inexpensive* meal.

**Negative connotation:** cheap

**Positive connotation:** economical

1. Kevin's interest in model cars has turned into a *hobby*.

**Negative connotation:** fixation

**Positive connotation:** pastime

1. Uncle Henry lives in a *hut* deep in the woods.

**Negative connotation:** shanty

**Positive connotation:** cottage

1. Phileas Fogg was an *adventurous* traveller.

**Negative connotation:** reckless

**Positive connotation:** daring

1. We stopped for lunch at a *diner* in West Virginia.

**Negative connotation:** dive

**Positive connotation:** eatery

1. My parents are committed, *conservationists*.

**Negative connotation:** extremists

**Positive connotation:** advocates

1. My *old* laptop has finally died.

**Negative connotation:** obsolete

**Positive connotation:** seasoned

1. In a quiet and *stealthy* way, Bartleby moved into the lawyer's chambers.

**Negative connotation:** sly

**Positive connotation:** discreet

1. The teacher was mildly intimidated by Roland's *assertive* behaviour.

**Negative connotation:** aggressive

**Positive connotation:** self-assured

Sample Connotative Responses

I recognized the familiar *smell* of my roommate's cooking.

* **Negative connotation:** stench
* **Positive connotation:** aroma

Scrapple is an *inexpensive* meal.

* **Negative connotation:** cheap
* **Positive connotation:** thrifty

Kevin's interest in model cars has turned into a *hobby*.

* **Negative connotation:** obsession
* **Positive connotation:** [avocation](https://www.thoughtco.com/avocation-and-vocation-1689309)

Uncle Henry lives in a *hut* deep in the woods.

* **Negative connotation:** shack
* **Positive connotation:** cabin

Phileas Fogg was an *adventurous* traveller.

* **Negative connotation:** foolhardy
* **Positive connotation:** courageous

We stopped for lunch at a *diner* in West Virginia.

* **Negative connotation:** greasy spoon
* **Positive connotation:** café or bistro

My parents are committed *conservationists*.

* **Negative connotation:** tree huggers
* **Positive connotation:** environmentalists

My *old* laptop has finally died.

* **Negative connotation:** decrepit
* **Positive connotation:** venerable

In a quiet and *stealthy* way, Bartleby moved into the lawyer's chambers.

* **Negative connotation:** sneaky
* **Positive connotation:** clever and careful

The teacher was mildly intimated by Roland's *assertive* behavior.

* **Negative connotation:** bossy
* **Positive connotation:** confident