# **Denotative Imagemaking: Definition & Applications**

## **What Is Denotative Image Making?**

Has an advertisement in a magazine or online ever caught your eye? What kind of images did it use?

Advertisers have many ways of getting our attention. Sometimes, they show you exactly what they're selling. If a store or business sells apples, they'll include images of an apple in their ads. This is an example of a denotative image.

A **denotative image** is a rendering of something much as it looks in real life. Even if it's not drawn in a completely realistic way, people will easily understand what it is. Denotative images are straightforward images of a familiar object or thing. They're one of the simplest kinds of image making used in graphic design, and they don't have any deeper or hidden meanings.

| Denotative image  ***A denotative image is a straightforward rendering of something. In this image, the subject is clearly catsup.*** |
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And to cover another basic definition, **graphic design** is the process of combining words and pictures to convey ideas. It's important to fields like advertising, and it's all around us. If you've visited a website to buy something or looked at your favorite magazine, you've experienced the effects of graphic design.

So, denotative images can be used in graphic design to connect a company and a product. The image can be very detailed or just a simple outline. It can be in bright colors or rendered in cool, muted tones. But if it's recognizable and has no other meaning than what it is, it's a denotative image.

It's the opposite of a **connotative image**, which adds layers of meaning to the image. Connotative images make people think more about what they mean. They're less straightforward, with sometimes multiple meanings that go beyond the literal image.

## **Uses of Denotative Image Making**

So, why does such an idea matter? Why would a designer use a denotative image?

Denotative images provide an obvious connection between a company or business and a product. They show a possible customer what the product looks like and link that product to the company's name and brand.

| Denotative image  ***Denotative images make straightforward connections between brand and product.***    ***A connotative image has layers of meaning. It is less straightforward.*** |
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Look around you, at ads on websites and on billboards along the highway. Denotative images are everywhere. For example, many food companies use denotative images to show their products. A condiment bottle is pictured in a bright color. An advertisement for a jewelry store includes, against a white background, a single photograph of a diamond ring. Such images make a straightforward point about a product or object—that it's fresh, that it's beautiful and desirable. By using a representational image of the product they're selling or promoting, they catch your eye in the most direct way possible.

So, the next time you're in a store or looking at something on the web, stop and look at the ads. Can you identify which ones use denotative images?