

CHAPTER 6

6. What Are Synonyms, Antonyms and Homonyms?

Learning a word's meaning is just one part of understanding that word. Once you know a word's antonyms, synonyms and homonyms, you can add a lot of variety to speech and writing. But what are synonyms and antonyms, and what do they have to do with homonyms? Learn more about each type of word and how they can help increase your vocabulary.

6.1. What Are Synonyms?

Words with similar meanings in similar contexts. They are used to add variety to writing and speech and allow you to avoid repetition. The words amazing, astounding and marvelous are all synonyms. Their meanings are similar and can be interchanged with one another.

Synonyms must be the same part of speech. For example, beautiful and princess have the same connotation of beauty, but they are not synonyms because beautiful is an adjective and princess is a noun.

Synonyms are never used in exactly the same way in a language. There is always some situation where one of the words is preferred over its synonym.

Examples of synonym pairs include:

☐ Large - Big

☐ Cough - Hack

☐ Couch - Sofa

☐ Quick - Fast

☐ skill and ability

☐ lead and guide

☐ guest and visitor

☐ love and adore

Synonyms make it possible for writers to create a certain mood with their subtle differences.

For example, the verb "walk" sets a different pace than "saunter," and "drink" implies a different style than "guzzle." The differences are implied by the word selected, and when a writer is trying to paint a picture in a reader's mind, those differences can make or break a writer's prose.

Activity: Synonyms

Can you think of any situations where an English speaker would say large but not big? Or one where a native speaker would say big but not large? How do the following examples compare?

This is my big brother.

This is my large brother.

Do the two sentences have the same meanings? Do the synonyms big and large have exactly the same meanings?

6.2. What Are Antonyms?

Words with opposite meanings are called antonyms. Like synonyms, antonym pairs must be the same part of speech. Antonyms show a contrast between two ideas.

Examples of antonym word pairs are:

- * full and empty
- * fail and succeed
- * happy and sad
- * tiny and enormous
- * wonderful and terrible
- * alive - dead
- * asleep - awake
- * pregnant - not pregnant

Some common prefixes indicate that a word is an antonym to its root word.

For example, the prefixes un- (unhappy, unwise), dis- (disinterested, dislike) and im- (improper, impolite) form a new word that is the opposite of its root word.

6.3. What Are Homonyms?

Homonyms are words that have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings.

Because these words sound and look the same but mean something different, they can be a source of entertainment, confusion or even inspiration. Many puns are inspired by homonym mix-ups!

Some common homonyms include:

- Bat - an implement used to hit a ball (such as a baseball bat) or a nocturnal flying mammal (such as a fruit bat)
- Bear - a hibernating animal (such as a grizzly bear) or to carry something (such as bearing children)
- Fire - a flaming blaze (such as a forest fire) or to terminate someone from a job (such as firing an employee)
- Trip - to stumble or fall (such as tripping on a curb) or a vacation (such as a summer trip)
- Watch - a wearable timepiece (such as a wristwatch) or to look at something (such as watching television)

Homonyms are often confused with homophones, which have the same pronunciation but are spelled differently, and homographs, which are pronounced differently but are spelled the same. It's helpful to know any homonyms to a word that you're learning in order to avoid word mix-ups in the future.