Literal and figurative language

Literal language refers to the *actual* or *factual meaning* of what you say or write.

Example: Jolene runs very fast.

Figurative language is made up of words or expressions that have an *implied meaning*. Idioms and figures of speech like similes, metaphors and personification all use figurative language to create pictures in the mind of listeners or readers.

Example: Jolene runs like the wind. ←— This means *Jolene runs very fast.*

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1. To ignore a person or treat them with neglect

2. To secretly gossip about someone

3. To accept the unpleasant consequences

4. To say what is upsetting you

5. To take a chance or risk on another's behalf

1. In the sentences below, the figurative expression has been written in italics. Use the context of the sentence to help you identify the correct definition from the box in the margin. Write the number of the definition in the box next to the sentence.

   a) Pieter has to *face the music* after he bunked school. ☐

   b) Good friends always *stick out their neck* for you. ☐

   c) Mario *gave me the cold shoulder* after our fight. ☐

   d) We need to *get things off our chest* if we are upset. ☐

   e) Tania always *speaks behind people's backs*. ☐

2. Refer to the list of expressions below. Draw a line between the expression and the correct context. The first one has been done for you.

Expression	Context
a) Back to square one	To have no understanding
b) Full of beans	To work hard
c) Cold feet	To start again
d) Burn the midnight oil	To lose courage
e) It's Greek to me	To be enthusiastic and energetic

Hint

There are no rules to learn about figurative expressions. You need to understand what they mean and learn them off by heart.

3. Identify which meaning is literal (L) and which is figurative (F) in the following sentences.

   a) The plane is ready to *take off*. ____ Please *take off* your coats and sit down. ____

   b) I was *cut off* when I was on the phone. ____ Jack *cut off* a big piece of meat. ____

   c) *Pick up* your pen. ____ I hope to *pick up* some study tips. ____

   d) Amanda says I should *look out* the window. ____ *Look out*! That dog's going to bite you! ____

   e) The can is *full of beans*. ____ The youngsters are *full of beans*. ____

Let's Practise

Denotation and connotation

Denotation refers to the literal, dictionary explanation of a word.

Examples: dumb: to be unable to speak
dictionary: a reference book about words

Connotation refers to the associations and emotions that words or phrases have for us.

Example: She was so angry she saw red. ← In this sentence, the word *red* is associated with anger.

If you call Anda *hot* and *cool*, the meaning has nothing to do with temperature (the direct meaning). The connotation here suggests that Anda is attractive and popular.

Some words have **positive connotations** and other words have **negative connotations**.

Examples: *Persistent* has a positive connotation that suggests someone keeps trying.
Stubborn has a negative connotation that suggests someone doesn't know when to stop.

1. We can often work out the denotation or connotation of a word from the sentence that it is used in. Indicate whether the underlined words are denotations (D) or connotations (C).

    a) That <u>red</u> flower is so pretty. _____

    b) I am <u>green</u> with envy at your new watch. _____

    c) Our maths exam was a <u>nightmare</u>. _____

    d) Petrus is the <u>backbone</u> of his team. _____

    e) I like the shade of <u>yellow</u> you painted the room. _____

> ⭐ **Note**
>
> *Denotation* comes from the word *denote*, which means *to show meaning*.

2. The following words are all related to the sense of smell and have different connotations. Write P next to the words that have positive connotations and N next to the words that have negative connotations.

stink _____   *aroma* _____   *fragrance* _____

smell _____

stench _____   **odour** _____   *s c e n t* _____