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# Choose the Right Word

*A Modern Guide to Synonyms*

DISTINCTIONS  
BETWEEN SYNONYMS  
CONCISELY EXPLAINED,  
WITH EXAMPLES FOR  
MORE THAN 6000  
COMMONLY USED  
WORDS

*S.I. Hayakawa*

Formerly titled Modern Guide to Synonyms

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*S.I. Hayakawa*



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# INTRODUCTION

by S. I. Hayakawa

English has the largest vocabulary and the most synonyms of any language in the world. This richness is due to the fact that the English language has grown over the centuries by constantly incorporating words from other languages. Even before the Norman Conquest, the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary included words borrowed from Latin (*street, mile*, the suffix *-chester* in the names of towns), Greek (*priest, bishop*), Celtic (*crag, bin*), and Scandinavian (*law, fellow, egg, thrall*). After the Norman Conquest, the English vocabulary was virtually doubled by the addition of French words, especially those reflecting a higher standard of living and a more complex social life: for example, words connected with food (*sugar, vinegar, boil, fry, roast*), clothing (*garment, robe, mantle, gown*), law (*plaintiff, perjury, legacy*), religion (*convent, hermitage, chaplain, cardinal*), and social rank and organization (*prince, duke, count, vassal, mayor, constable*).

While much of the new French vocabulary described new ideas and activities, much of it duplicated the pre-existing Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, giving the writer or speaker a choice of synonyms: *cure* (French) or *heal* (Anglo-Saxon), *table* or *board*, *poignant* or *sharp*, *labor* or *work*, *mirror* or *glass*, *assemble* or *meet*, *power* or *might*. Sometimes the duplication of vocabulary was used to make distinctions: *ox, swine, calf*, and *deer* were called, when killed and prepared for cooking, *beef, pork, veal*, and *venison*; *hitting, striking, stealing*, and *robbing* became, when viewed through the eyes of French law, *assault, battery, larceny*, and *burglary*.

With the enormous expansion of classical learning in the Renaissance, there was a great influx of words of Latin and Greek origin into the language, dictated by the demands of an enriched intellectual and cultural life. Also, the larger world discovered through travel (from the Crusades onward) and exploration (especially in the Elizabethan period) was a great stimulus to culture and language. There also arose in the sixteenth century a fashion of ornamenting one's discourse with what were then called "aureate" or "inkhorn" terms drawn from Greek and Latin. Shakespeare's "multitudinous seas incarnadine" is a famous example, and what happened to these particular words is typical of the fate of this new vocabulary: *multitudinous* stayed in the language as one of several synonyms for *many*, while *incarnadine* is not heard any more except in this context. In brief, many words of classical origin introduced into the language during the Renaissance became permanent additions, but most were soon forgotten or were relegated to special technical contexts, like *hebdomadary* (weekly) and *gessorial* (having to do with walking).

The adventures of English-speaking people as they traded and fought and traveled around the world in modern times—in Europe, North America, India, Australia, Africa—also expanded the vocabulary. Words were borrowed from Dutch (*tub, spool, deck*), Spanish (*sherry, armada, grenade*), American Indian (*squash, toboggan, hickory*), East Indian (*cashmere, punch, shampoo*), Afrikaans (*veld, trek*), Italian (*soprano, casino, macaroni*), Mexican (*chocolate, tomato*), Australian (*kan-garoo, billabong*), Japanese (*kimono, ricksha*), Malay (*amok, ketchup*), and many others.

Furthermore, the United States, as a separate nation with its own life and character and institutions, added vastly to the English vocabulary, beginning in Colonial times. With the rise of the United States to a position of world influence in politics, science, industry, trade, and the popular arts, American words and phrases have gained recognition and prestige everywhere. *Ice cream, jeep*, and *rock-and-roll* are internationally known terms, as are *containment, DEW-line*, and *nuclear deterrence*. Moreover, American terminology for many things exists side by side with an English terminology, placing another whole group of synonyms at our service: *help* (American) and *servant* (British), *sidewalk* and *pave-ment*, *billboard* and *hoarding*, *movies* and *flicks*, *druggist* and *chemist*, *installment plan* and *hire-purchase system*, *water-heater* and *geyser*, *checkers* and *draughts*, *soft drinks* and *mineral waters*, and so on through an almost interminable list.

Synonyms in English are therefore of many kinds. Some groups of synonyms, like *foreword* (English), *preface* (French), *introduction* (Latin), and *prolegomenon* (Greek), seem like a simple embarrassment of riches. Some, like *plain* (French), *steppe* (Russian), *pampas* (Spanish, from South American Indian), *prairie* (French voyageur), *savannah* (Spanish), *tundra* (Russian, from Lappish), refer to geographical variants of the same kind of thing. Others, like *teach, educate, indoctrinate, instruct, school, tutor*, differ from each other principally in degrees of abstraction: *teach* is certainly the most general word of this group, while the others are more specialized in application. Some words of quite similar meaning make distinctions at the concrete, descriptive level: *tip, cant, careen, heel, list, slant, slope, tilt; screech, scream, clamor, yammer, howl*. These are truly synonyms only if translated into more general form, the former group into *incline*, the latter into *outcry*.

It can be argued that there really are no exact synonyms—no exact equivalences of meaning. Such a position can be upheld if by “meaning” we refer to the total range of contexts in which a word may be used. Certainly there are no two words that are interchangeable in all the contexts in which either might appear. But within a given context, there is often exact synonymy: I *mis-laid* my wallet; I *mis-placed* my wallet. In a slightly different context, however, the two words are not interchangeable: it would not be idiomatic to say, I *mis-laid* my suitcase—all of which may suggest that while *mis-place* is applicable to both small objects and large, *mis-lay* applies only to small. Also, one may suffer disappointment because of *mis-placed*, but never *mis-laid*, trust. This example shows again that words which are synonymous in *one* of their meanings may differ considerably in their *other* meanings.

Some groups of words describe the same actions, but imply different relationships among the parties concerned. We *accompany* our equals; we *attend* or *follow* those to whom we are subordinate; we *conduct* those who need guidance, *escort* those who need protection, and *chaperone* those who need supervision; merchant ships are *convoyed* in time of war.

*Feminine*, *effeminate*, *womanly*, and *womanish* are much alike in referring to female characteristics, but the second applies only to males, and then in a derogatory sense.

Some differences in locution reveal differences in the degree of formality of the occasions described: a *luncheon* as distinguished from a *lunch*. Sometimes different locutions reveal differences not in the situations described but in the formality of discourse about them: *He went to bed*, for instance, as compared to *He hit the sack*.

Semanticists and linguistic scholars continue to remind us that words change in meaning according to time and place and circumstance. Their warnings are certainly not to be ignored. The *democracy* of Sweden is not identical with that which bears the same name in England, Japan, or the German Democratic Republic; and the *democracy* of any of these nations changes from decade to decade, from year to year.

Yet, with all the changes that go on both in language and in the world described by language, there are remarkable elements of stability in a vocabulary with as rich a literary and cultural history as English. The distinctions between *bravery* and *foolhardiness*, between *weeping* and *whining*, between *fury* and *rage*, between *thought* and *deliberation*, between *desolate* and *disconsolate*, remain remarkably constant through Shakespeare to Swift to Jane Austen to Mark Twain to the present-day English or American (or Canadian or Australian) writer. It is gratifying to call the reader's attention to the many new words—even fad words—and new meanings discussed in the present volume. But I like to think that the reader will find equal pleasure—perhaps more—in the continuities and constancies in the meanings of English words that persist despite changes of time and changes of scene.

Nothing is so important to clear and accurate expression as the ability to distinguish between words of similar, but not identical, meaning. There are occasions in which we have to make choices between *transient* and *transitory*, *mutual* and *reciprocal*, *gaudy* and *garish*, *inherent* and *intrinsic*, *speculate* and *ruminate*, *pinnacle* and *summit*, because in a given context one is certain to be more appropriate than the other. To choose wrongly is to leave the hearer or reader with a fuzzy or mistaken impression. To choose well is to give both illumination and delight. The study of synonyms will help the reader come closer to saying what he really wants to say.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

**Using the Index.** To find a word you want, turn first to the Index, beginning on p. 701. If the word is printed in small capital letters, as in the case of COURAGE, for example, that word appears as the head word of an essay. The page number on which that essay begins appears to the right of the word. You may then turn directly to the indicated page in the main section of the book. You will find COURAGE, for example, as the head word of an essay comparing *backbone, fortitude, grit, guts, nerve, pluck,* and *resolution* beginning on page 133. More often, however, the word you are interested in will *not* be a head word, but will appear in an essay listed under another word. In that event the Index will cross-refer you to the head word, printed in small capital letters, under which the word you are seeking will appear. Suppose you want to find *indigent*. In the Index you will find: indigent PENNILESS 433. This means that *indigent* is discussed in an essay under the head word PENNILESS beginning on page 433.

Some words, like *good*, have so many important meanings that they must be included in several essays that discuss different aspects of meaning. In such cases the nature of the head word will suggest which meaning is discussed. For example:

good BENEFICIAL 45  
good OBEDIENT 402

Head words are always identified by part of speech when ambiguity would otherwise result. For example:

ACT (n) 5  
deluge FLOOD (v) 224  
DEMAND (v) 151  
retreat ESCAPE (v) 197

In a few cases the same word appears as the head word of more than one essay; the Index distinguishes between such essays by listing either the part of speech or, if both are of the same part of speech, by the alphabetically-first word discussed in each essay after the head word. For example:

PLAIN (n) 445  
PLAIN (adj) 446  
REQUEST (n) 504  
REQUEST (v) 505  
STOP (arrest) 592  
STOP (cease) 593

**Finding the Word You Want.** To aid you in locating the word you want, the head word of each essay is printed in large, boldface type in



the margin beside the point where its essay begins. The other words discussed are printed in large, lightface type in the margins below their respective head words. Whenever there is not room to list all the words on the first page of an essay, the head word is repeated on the following page with the word *continued* in parentheses, with the remaining words treated in the essay listed below. In addition, the first paragraph of each essay begins without indentation to mark off even more clearly where each essay starts.

As a further aid in finding the word you want, the first occurrence of each word discussed within each essay appears in prominent boldface type, subsequent occurrences in italic type. Thus if you are looking for a particular word, for example *perennial* in the essay PERMANENT, you needn't read about *lasting*, *enduring*, *perpetual*, and *durable*—all discussed first—in order to get to it. Just scan the boldface words until you find what you are looking for. Of course, we hope you will more often want to read the entire essay, but we have made this guide to synonyms flexible enough to be useful for quick reference as well.

**Cross-References.** Cross-references at the end of essays, as in the Index, are always made to head words which, as stated above, always appear in small capital letters. We have used cross-references liberally in the hope of stimulating the reader's interest to turn to other related essays and learn more about the complicated but fascinating interrelationships that exist between clusters of meaning in English. Cross-references, therefore, do not necessarily refer to a word of the same part of speech as the head word of the essay under which they appear. For instance, under SARCASTIC, an adjective, cross-references are made to CONTEMPTUOUS (an adjective), RIDICULE (a noun), SCOFF (a verb), and SOUR (an adjective). Cross-references are thus not intended to refer you to other synonyms or near-synonyms, but are used as a means of suggesting relationships that may interest you. Sometimes these relationships are close enough to approximate synonymy, as in the cross-reference to CLEAN from SANITARY; at other times, the relationship is one of nuance or similarity of usual context and is very far removed from synonymy, as in the cross-reference to MOUNTAIN and STEEP from ROUGH. In this way we hope to enlarge the reader's grasp of vocabulary and meaning, to lure him on, so to speak, into making more extensive inquiries than he perhaps originally intended, and thereby to help him discover how richly and subtly intertwined are the many elements of the English vocabulary.

**Antonyms.** Not every essay suggests a set of antonyms, and we have not attempted to force lists of antonyms into positions where they do not fit. Essays like CHARACTERISTIC, ROTATE, and SAMPLE can have no antonyms. Antonyms are listed at the end of those essays to which they apply following the indented word *Antonyms*. The antonym lists serve a different function from that of the cross-references, and the treatment accorded them is therefore different. Antonym lists are commonly used by people searching for a word rather than a meaning. Antonym lists should therefore be of the same part of speech as that of the words discussed in the essay under which they appear. You will note that some antonyms are listed in italic type whereas others are listed in small capital letters: for example, the antonyms of SAVORY are listed as BLAND, *insipid*, *tasteless*. Words listed in small capital letters are head words, and rather than repeat every word discussed in the essay designated, we refer the reader to the essay itself. The antonyms printed in italic

type are either not included in the work or are not included in a sense antonymic to that of the head word under which they appear. For example, *graceful* and *sure* are listed in italic type among the antonyms of CLUMSY, even though *graceful* is discussed under EXQUISITE and *sure* is a head word in its own right. But since all the words discussed at EXQUISITE and SURE are not antonyms to CLUMSY, we cannot fairly refer the reader to these essays. Thus whenever an antonym appears in small capital letters, you can be sure that each word discussed under that head word is also an antonym.

We have tried to make this work accurate, clear, and as easy to use as possible, but we are only too well aware of our fallibility. If the reader has any suggestions on how the book might be improved—by the correction of existing essays, by rearranging the present groups of synonyms, or by the addition of other essays not now included—he is most cordially invited to write to: Harper & Row, Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10022.

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## A

These words, all relatively formal, indicate the taking in of one thing by another. **Absorb** is slightly more informal than the others and has, perhaps, the widest range of uses. In its most restricted sense, it suggests the taking in or soaking up specifically of liquids: the ink *absorbed* by the blotter. In more general uses, it may imply the thoroughness of the action: not merely to read the chapter, but to *absorb* its meaning. Or it may stress the complete disappearance of the thing taken in within the encompassing medium: once-lovely countryside *absorbed* by urban sprawl. **Ingest** refers literally to the action of taking into the mouth, as food or drugs, for later absorption by the body. Figuratively it designates any taking in, and suggests the receptivity necessary for such a process: too tired to *ingest* even one more idea from the complicated philosophical essay he was reading. To **digest** is to alter food chemically in the digestive tract so that it can be *absorbed* into the bloodstream. In other uses, *digest* is like *absorb* in stressing thoroughness, but is even more emphatic. [You may completely *absorb* a stirring play in one evening, but you will be months *digesting* it.]

**Assimilate** is even more emphatic about the thoroughness of the taking in than either *absorb* or *digest*—in both its specific physiological and general uses. Physiologically, food is first *digested*, then *absorbed* by the bloodstream, and then *assimilated* bit by bit in each cell the blood passes. In more general uses, *assimilate*, unlike previous words, often implies a third agent beside the absorber and the absorbed—an agent that directs this process: the architect who *assimilates* his building to its environment. The process, furthermore, often implies the complete transformation of the absorbed into the absorbing medium. *Assimilate* also suggests a much slower process than *digest* and certainly than *absorb*, which can be nearly instantaneous: It would take the city generations to *assimilate* the newcomers into the patterns of a strange life.

**Incorporate** is the only word here that does not have a specific use pertaining to the taking in of liquids or of food, meaning literally “to embody.” It compares to that aspect of *assimilate* which stresses the loss of separate identity for the absorbed quantity: *incorporating* your proposals into a new system that will satisfy everyone. It is unlike *assimilate* in lacking that word’s suggestion of necessarily careful, time-consuming thoroughness.

**Imbibe**, while capable of uses comparable to those for *assimilate*, is mainly rooted still to its specific use for the taking in of liquids. Even this use, and certainly any others, now sound slightly archaic and excessively formal: Do you *imbibe* alcoholic beverages? See **EAT**.

*Antonyms: disgorge, disperse, dissipate, eject, emit, exude.*

**absorb**

assimilate

digest

imbibe

incorporate

ingest

**abstain**

forbear  
refrain

**Abstain** means to withhold oneself from an action or self-indulgence. [There were six votes in favor, two against, and two *abstaining*; He *abstained* from drinking.] **Refrain** has to do with withholding an action temporarily, or checking a momentary desire: She *refrained* from scolding her child until the company left. To **forbear**, in its intransitive sense, is to exercise self-control, often out of motives of patience or charity. [Though impatient, the customer *forbore* to upbraid the harried sales clerk; The teacher *forbore* to report Johnnie's misbehavior to his parents.] See FORGO, FORSWEAR.

*Antonyms:* BEGIN, PERMIT.

**absurd**

farcical  
foolish  
irrational  
ludicrous  
preposterous  
ridiculous  
senseless  
silly  
unreasonable

**Absurd** means opposed to reason or truth, and may be applied to that which is grossly, and sometimes grotesquely, inconsistent with common sense or experience. **Preposterous** denotes a great contrariness to nature, reason, or common sense, and is used to describe that which is outrageously *absurd*. **Ridiculous** refers to that which is *absurd* in a way that invites ridicule or mockery. [It is *absurd* to predict that the sun will not rise tomorrow; It is *preposterous* that virtue should go unrewarded while vice goes unpunished; It is *ridiculous* to judge a foreign culture by its plumbing.]

**Farcical** and **ludicrous** are applied to that which is *absurd* in an amusing way. *Farcical* indicates a humorous distortion of fact, convention, or reason. *Ludicrous* implies playful absurdity, but may also be synonymous with *ridiculous* in describing something that is greeted with scorn or derision. [The *farcical* introduction of a talking horse gave the play its flavor; The *ludicrous* antics of the *harlequins* delighted the audience; The speaker made a series of *ludicrous* mistakes which were rewarded with hoots and catcalls.]

**Foolish**, **senseless**, and **silly** add a suggestion of folly or even of a trivial intellect to their synonymy with *absurd*. [To buy stocks in an unlisted gold-brick enterprise is a *foolish* investment; To beat a dead horse is *senseless*; To make unsupportable claims is *silly* affectation.]

**Unreasonable** and **irrational** mean contrary to reason, the difference between them being the fact that *unreasonable* implies a bias or intent to go wrong and *irrational* suggests an uncontrollable lack of understanding. [It is *unreasonable* to maintain a *geocentric* theory of the universe; It is *irrational* to expect an adult reaction from a child.] See HUMOROUS.

*Antonyms:* consistent, logical, rational, reasonable, sagacious, SENSIBLE.

**accompany**

attend  
chaperon  
conduct  
convoy  
escort

**Accompany** and **attend** are alike in meaning to go with, but each suggests a different relationship between persons. We *accompany* our equals, and *attend* those to whom we would show courtesy or to whom we are subordinate. When they refer to things, *accompany* and *attend* mean to be present with as a result of. [A sense of accomplishment often *accompanies* hard effort; A feeling of depression *attends* many illnesses.]

**Escort** and **convoy** are closely related, but *escort* is the broader term. To *convoy* means to *accompany* ships or vehicles for protection, while to *escort* is to go with them, or with persons, either for the purpose of guarding or as a mark of courtesy. Militarily, a land movement is *escorted*, a sea movement *convoyed*. During World War II, merchant ships were *convoyed* across the Atlantic by the Navy. A troop march may be *escorted* by armed vehicles. As a mark of courtesy, a ship making its maiden voyage is *escorted* by other craft in or out of the harbor. A boy is expected to *escort* his date to the door.

**Chaperon** means to *accompany*, but carries the implication of guidance or supervision in the interests of protection or propriety. A young girl may be *chaperoned* by her aunt while traveling abroad; a college instructor may be asked to *chaperon* a basketball dance.

**Conduct**, like *chaperon*, suggests guidance as part of *accompanying*, but here the interest is merely to physically lead: Let's hire a guide to *conduct* us through the old section of town. See GUIDE.

**Antonyms:** LEAVE.

**Accomplice** and **confederate** both denote a person who is associated with another in the perpetration of a crime, whether that association is limited to the planning stages or is extended to the entire execution of the wrongdoing. Thus, an *accomplice* or *confederate* may, but need not necessarily, be present at the scene of the crime. [The role of the murderer's *accomplice* was that of weapon procurer; Although Fredericks planned the theft, it was one of his *confederates* who actually entered the house and stole the jewels.]

An **abettor** is an *accomplice* or *confederate* who is present and who participates in the execution of a crime. A look-out is an *abettor* in a bank robbery.

**Accessory** is the legal term for an *accomplice* who helps a felon without being present at the scene of the crime. If he helps the felon's preparations, he is an *accessory* before the fact; if he helps the felon to escape punishment once the crime has been committed, he is an *accessory* after the fact.

**Conspirator** and **plotter** refer to persons who are involved in a secret or underhanded agreement to do some evil act. *Conspirators* are those who take part in a *conspiracy*, which is a legal term denoting an intention to violate the law; in general use, it is applied to major crimes and even more particularly to treason. *Plotters* are implicated in an activity which has a sinister purpose, but which, even though it is difficult to plan and execute, may be petty in scope. See ASSISTANT, ASSOCIATE, HELP.

**Antonyms:** OPPONENT.

**Accumulate** and **amass** both mean to pile up by successive addition. To *accumulate* is to heap or pile up or bring together by degrees or by regular additions; to *amass* is to bring together a great quantity and usually suggests great value. A housewife may *accumulate* trading stamps. A speculator may try to *amass* great wealth; an army may *amass* armaments for a final push. **Collect** and **gather** are interchangeable in the sense of bringing together into one place or into a group. *Collect*, however, suggests discriminating selection in a way that *gather* does not: to *collect* stamps as a hobby but with the idea of reselling them later at a profit; to *gather* a large bunch of wildflowers along a country road. **Hoard** means to *gather* and store for the sake of accumulation. It always connotes a selfish desire to keep permanently or for future use and suggests secrecy in the process. [A miser *hoards* his money; In wartime, individuals may *hoard* scarce items.] See FILE.

**Antonyms:** *disperse, dissipate, scatter, spend, squander, waste.*

All these words, as here considered, mean a mass of things that come or are brought together. They all imply that the things are neither merged with one another nor united organically in the resultant mass. **Accumulation** means that the things have come together by a series of

**accomplice**

abettor  
accessory  
confederate  
conspirator  
plotter

**accumulate**

amass  
collect  
gather  
hoard

**accumulation**

aggregation

**accumulation**

(continued)

collection

conglomeration

additions rather than all at once. It often implies that the things are of the same kind, such as the *accumulation* of dust on surfaces, or of money in banks, and does not imply any coherence or organization in the mass gathered.

**Collection** and *accumulation* are often used interchangeably, but *collection* frequently implies a high degree of selection and organization in the mass collected: An *accumulation* of many specimens is needed when one is preparing a scientific *collection*.

**Aggregation** always denotes a mass brought together that forms, in some sense, a coherent whole, but one that has a lesser degree of organization than does a *collection*: An industrial empire is often an *aggregation* of unrelated enterprises.

**Conglomeration** implies that many different and sometimes even incongruous things are brought together from widely scattered sources or regions: The population of New York City is a *conglomeration* of many different kinds of people from various countries and cultures. See **PILE**.

**accurate**

correct

exact

nice

precise

right

true

**Accurate, exact, precise, and true**, as here considered, agree in implying close conformity to an objective standard. *Accurate* suggests that there are degrees of conformity to such a standard and stresses the painstaking care necessary for the attainment of fidelity to truth or fact: It took a week of investigation to get an even reasonably *accurate* account of the accident. *Exact* emphasizes extreme accuracy in measurable quantities and qualities: The *exact* wave length assigned to a transmitting station must always be maintained. *Precise* stresses great accuracy in regard to minute details: The assembling of the parts of a watch must be *precise*. *True*, as here considered, implies absolute accuracy, particularly in reproductions of an original: a *true* copy of a birth certificate.

**Correct** suggests the absence of error or fault and a conformity to some standard. It is more general than the other words in this group because it applies to such things as taste and fashion as well as to truth or fact: the *correct* dress for a formal dinner. **Right** is largely interchangeable with *correct*, but often adds a hint of moral approval: the *right* course of action.

**Nice**, in this sense, meaning a high or even an inordinate degree of precision or exactness, is passing out of usage, but it is still encountered in formal writing. See **DUPLICATE, GENUINE**.

*Antonyms: erroneous, false, inaccurate, incorrect, inexact, wrong.*

**accuse**

arraign

charge

impeach

incriminate

indict

These words all mean to declare a person to be guilty of some offense or shortcoming. **Accuse** is the most general word, and may be used in formal or informal, official or personal, contexts. An investigating committee may *accuse* an officeholder of wrongdoing; a neighbor may *accuse* a man of playing his radio too loud.

**Charge**, in this context, means to *accuse* formally, usually before a court; by extension, it means to *accuse* informally of a violation of some accepted standard. [The police *charged* the driver with reckless driving; The candidate *charged* his opponent with evasion of the basic issues.]

**Incriminate** means to *charge* a person with a crime directly, or to involve him in a crime by damaging testimony. In popular use, the latter is the more usual meaning: He was *incriminated* by an eye witness who placed him at the scene of the crime.

**Indict** and **arraign** are legal terms. *Indict* is to *charge* officially and

to make subject to an appearance before a jury or judge. In an extended sense, *indict* is to *charge* unofficially but publicly: to *indict* a school of writing or painting as being obscurantist. To *arraign*, legally, is to call an *indicted* person before a court for trial; by extension, to *arraign* is to call publicly but unofficially a person or a movement to stand judgment before public opinion or some other standard.

Technically, **impeach** means to *arraign* a public official before a competent tribunal on a charge of malfeasance in office. In the United States, the House of Representatives *impeaches* federal officeholders, and the Senate sits as the court. [In February, 1868, President Andrew Johnson was *impeached* by the House; in May of that year he was acquitted by the Senate by a margin of one vote.] In extended use, to *impeach* is to discredit or to call into question: to *impeach* a witness; to *impeach* a person's motives. See DISAPPROVAL, REBUKE.

**Antonyms:** EXONERATE, PARDON.

These words agree in meaning to accept openly, though with some reluctance, the truth or existence of a fact, condition, etc. One **acknowledges** something embarrassing or awkward, and usually not voluntarily; more often, the acknowledgment is extracted from one more or less unwillingly: The general *acknowledged* that the war had not been going as well as expected, but he affirmed that a shift in strategy would enhance the prospects of victory.

**Admit** is a bold acknowledgment of implication in something one has formerly tended to deny or to *equivocate* about: He *admitted* under questioning that he was in the service of a foreign power, but denied that he was guilty of espionage. One *concedes*, usually because of overwhelming evidence, something which he has been very reluctant to *admit*. [He had no choice but to *concede* that he had been guilty of bad judgment; In the face of the disastrous military battle, they *conceded* that victory was no longer attainable, and agreed to a negotiated surrender.] **Confess** is to *admit* guilt, as to a crime, or to *admit* to a shortcoming: to *confess* that he was an accomplice of the robbery; He *confessed* that he had never read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. See ASSERT.

**Antonyms:** CONTRADICT, FORSWEAR.

An **act**, in the sense considered here, is something that is done. The *act* may be done by a person, a group, or an impersonal entity, and is not limited by motive, nature, or result. Thus, an *act* of God is a violent outbreak of nature; the *act* of a *maniac* may endanger the community; the *act* of a *philanthropist* may enrich it. While *act* refers to something that is accomplished, **action** refers to the accomplishing of it or the process by which it is accomplished: the *action* of acid on metal.

**Deed**, while sometimes used to connote any *act*, good or bad, big or small, is usually synonymous with **exploit** and **feat** in meaning an achievement of great courage, nobility, intelligence, strength, or skill. An *exploit* is often a physical *act*; discovering a continent, scaling a high mountain, rocketing to a distant planet, and descending to the ocean floor are all *exploits*. A *feat* may also be a physical *act*, but it applies to mental *acts* as well. [Formulating the General Theory of Relativity was a prodigious mental *feat*; Playing several chess games simultaneously while blindfolded is a remarkable and impressive *feat*.] A *deed* is generally an *act* that is noteworthy for its difficulty or nobility. [The labors of Hercules were *deeds* of courage and ingenuity; A good *deed* may range from endowing a university to helping an old lady cross the street.]

**acknowledge**

- admit
- concede
- confess

**act**

- action
- deed
- exploit
- feat
- operation
- performance



**Operation** and **performance** in this context can be synonymous with *act* or *action*, but are usually considered to be combinations of *acts* or the manner in which they are carried out. A military *operation* is a series of coordinated individual and group *acts*; the *performance* of an employee is the manner in which he carries out the *acts* that are part of his job's routine. See METHOD, PERFORM.

## activity

**Activity** means the state of being in motion, or the expenditure of energy. *Activity* is a broad word, applicable to physical or mental exertions or pursuits by a person or a group, and is often used to convey the idea of a number of separate simultaneous or successive operations: the *activity* of the heart; a busy week filled with social *activities*.

### bustle

### commotion

### stir

### to-do

**Bustle**, **commotion**, **stir**, and **to-do** all mean a feverish, noisy, or excited *activity* by either an individual or a group. *Bustle* suggests busyness, *activity* with a purpose: the *bustle* on the floor of the stock exchange. *Commotion* suggests excitement and noisy disorganization: the *commotion* in a schoolroom during the teacher's absence. *Stir* suggests excited or lively movement: the *stir* aroused in the stands by a brilliant play on the field. *To-do* hints at unnecessary or uncalled-for excitement: the *to-do* generated by the new secretary coming to work in slacks and loafers. See ACT.

*Antonyms:* *inactivity, inertia, inertness, laziness, SLOTH.*

## acumen

These words all refer to a highly developed mental ability to see or understand what is not obvious. **Acumen** has to do with keenness of intellect, and implies an uncommon quickness and discrimination of mind. It requires *acumen* to solve an intricate problem in human relationships, or to emerge unscathed from a venture into the stock market.

### acuity

### insight

### perception

**Insight** and **perception** mean the power to recognize the hidden springs of behavior or the true nature or cause of a situation or condition: A psychiatrist's *insight* into human behavior may uncover the underlying cause of a boy's delinquency; a doctor's *perception* may recognize a patient's complaints as symptoms of a psychic disorder. *Perception* in its basic sense applies to anything recognized or understood by the senses, and in its extended sense to anything recognized or understood by the mind, thus suggesting a likeness between mind and the senses. *Perception* therefore suggests a view of the mind as a keenly receptive but nonetheless passive instrument, sensitive to very slight stimuli. *Insight*, on the other hand, is consistent with a view of the mind as an active agent, seeking and sifting ideas and probabilities as well as the evidence of sensations. In most contexts *insight* implies a more profound use of intellect and wisdom than does *perception*; *insight* suggests a knowledge of the inner character or essence of a thing, whereas *perception* relies primarily on the sharpness or **acuity** of one's senses.

*Acuity* means sharpness or keenness, and is applied exclusively to *perception*: visual *acuity*; The intelligence test was used as a basis for judging his mental *acuity*. See KEEN, SENSATION, VISION, WISDOM.

*Antonyms:* *bluntness, dullness, obtuseness, stupidity.*

## adapt

**Adapt** and **adjust** mean to change someone or something to suit new circumstances or a different environment. *Adapt* involves considerable change to meet new requirements, while *adjust* implies a minor change, as in the alignment of parts: to *adapt* a novel for the stage; to *adjust* a motor; to *adjust* the differences between two parties in a dispute. *Adapt* emphasizes the purpose for which the change must be

### accommodate

### adjust