

Meanings of Communication

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson covers the meaning behind communication, whether that is the denotation, connotation, or contextual meaning. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Meanings of Communication](#)
2. [Clarifying Tips](#)

1. Meanings of Communication

Every word and every phrase has a meaning, whether it's denotation, connotation, or contextual meaning. Oftentimes there could be a difference between them.

- **Denotation** is the dictionary definition of a word or phrase.
- **Connotation** is the tone or feeling of a word or phrase.
- **Contextual meaning** is the meaning of a word or phrase within a particular context.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Take a look at the word "sick." The denotation of that is to be ailing physically or emotionally. The connotation of sick is generally negative, but watch how it can change:

Sick		
Denotation	Connotation	Contextual
Ailing physically or emotionally	Negative	Awesome. <i>"Those graphics are sick."</i>

When different groups work together, they start to develop their own language. Maybe in this instance you have a group of graphic designers, and they use the word "sick" to mean something good. "Sick" now all of a sudden has a positive connotation.

If they were to be communicating outside of their group, this could be a common source of miscommunication. On the other side, if you're outside of that group, and they're talking about the word "sick," it's important to not assume that you know the meaning of it.

Let's take a look at another example.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Suppose you have an employee that sends out an email that says, "I need you to create a flowchart for this project."

<i>"I need you to create a flowchart for this project."</i>		
Denotation	Connotation	Contextual
Visual representation of responsibilities and deliverables identified by shapes	Rigid/structured	Informal timeline with due dates

The denotation of "flowchart" is a visual representation of responsibilities and deliverables identified by shapes. The connotation of a flowchart is very rigid and structured.

Say this employee works in a group, and his or her idea of a flowchart is that it is just an informal timeline with due dates. For that employee and his or her group, a flowchart is a straight line with additional lines to indicate dates and deliverables.

The people in this group communicate all the time, so they have a common understanding of what their flowchart is. People who are not in that group or new to the group may not understand.



TERMS TO KNOW

Denotation

The dictionary definition of a word or phrase.

Connotation

The tone or feeling of a word or phrase.

Contextual Meaning

The meaning of a word or phrase within a particular context.

2. Clarifying Tips

There's a way to remedy situations where there is a misunderstanding or a lack of clarity. These people need to be clear and concise with their communication. They need to know their audience. If they're outside of their internal group, they need to be able to tweak their message. Maybe they will need to explain what is needed with a flowchart.

Communication should be free of bias to ensure it's neutral. You want to ensure the intended message was received correctly. Ask yourself: how was my tone? Was emphasis placed where it needed to be so this person is clear on what's expected?

Note groups or individuals with different cultural backgrounds. You want to be sure that the intention of your message has been received correctly. It's also important to communicate clearly to groups of people that have

experienced ineffective communication. Pay special attention to those complex communications. If there are fewer roles established, follow through to make sure team members understand what they're doing.



SUMMARY

The **components of communication** are mostly nonverbal cues that, in some cases, trump what is said. **Nonverbal communication** is things such as facial expressions, gestures, body position, tone, and the context. It is important to be careful in **written communication** because it lacks nonverbal cues. **Contextual meaning** can change depending on situations and the groups interacting. It's really important to make sure that you take into consideration cultural backgrounds and other professional experience so the communication is clear and concise.

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY KELLY NORDSTROM FOR SOPHIA LEARNING. PLEASE SEE OUR [TERMS OF USE](#).



TERMS TO KNOW

Connotation

The tone or feeling of a word or phrase.

Contextual Meaning

The meaning of a word or phrase within a particular context.

Denotation

The dictionary definition of a word or phrase.