

## Connotation and Denotation

**Denotation** is the dictionary definition of a term. It is the literal meaning of a word, what a term *means*.

**Connotation** is the emotions, thoughts, images, and associations attached to a word. It is what a term *implies*. Terms can have positive, negative, or even neutral connotations. It all depends on the context, how and where the word is used.

A set of terms could have the same **denotation** (definitions), but make different impressions on readers because they have different **connotations**, or they are used in a certain way to imply different meanings. Let's look at two pairs of terms that have very similar denotations, but different connotations.

### **Example #1: berserk and irrational**

- Both terms denote unreasonable and illogical behavior
- Berserk connotes behavior that is completely out of control, to the point of being reckless. It is a more extreme term
- Irrational connotes behavior that is simply absurd or senseless; it implies a lack of logic rather than a lack of control.

### **Example #2: to finish and to terminate**

- Again, both terms denote bringing something to an end
- “To finish” can have positive connotations: a sense of completion and accomplishment (finishing school, crossing the finish line); it can also have neutral connotations (I finished folding the laundry); and it can sometimes have negative connotations: a sense of an eternal end (You're finished in this town! You'll never work here again!)
- “To terminate” really only has negative connotations: termination implies an eternal end, but does not imply completion or accomplishment. No one ever races to cross the “termination line.”
- Again, we can see that one term is much more extreme than the other, even though they are very similar.

SOURCE: DEFINITIONS FROM MERRIAM-WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY