

Grammar Help Sheet: Synonyms and Antonyms

The quickest and briefest way to show the meaning of a word is to give another word that has almost the same meaning. We call such words **synonyms**.

Dictionaries give *order* as a synonym of *command*.

Sometimes we can pinpoint a word by giving another word that is almost the exact opposite. We call such words **antonyms**.

Eager is an antonym of *reluctant*.

Look at the way **synonyms** can help us with unfamiliar words:

exorbitant - excessive, extravagant, unreasonable

rustic - rural, simple, rough, uncouth

Look at the way **antonyms** can help us understand the meaning of an unfamiliar word:

sophisticated - crude, naïve, simple

Remember:

We usually have a choice of several words that mean roughly but not quite the same thing. As a result of constant additions over the centuries, our language offers us a wealth of resources. When we travel, the result may be a *trip*, *journey*, *voyage*, *excursion*, *jaunt*, or even a *tour*. It may also be an *expedition*, *cruise*, or *safari*. A “word hoard” like *Roget’s Thesaurus* lists key ideas and then provides dozens of closely related words. How do the following words overlap in meaning? How do they differ?

food nourishment, sustenance, nurture, provender, provisions, rations, diet, edibles, victuals, viands

repetition reiteration, duplication, recurrence, echo, encore, refrain, recapitulation

sad unhappy, melancholy, downcast, dejected, low, sorrowful, blue, brokenhearted, depressed, miserable, gloomy

Learn to choose the synonym with the right shade of meaning. No two words are interchangeable. Synonyms are words that mean almost the same - but not quite. *Discard* and *spurn* are synonyms of *reject*. But we discard things rather casually. We *reject* something more deliberately. We *spurn* something with indignation.

