TASK: Read the target words. Practice using them by means of the exercises presented here.

LESSON 38

The Written Word

Target Words

1. advent
2. ambiguous
3. connotation
4. decipher
5. denote
6. illiterate
7. ingenious
8. inscription
9. phonetic
10. symbolic

Definitions and Samples

1. **advent** *n.* Coming; arrival

The **advent** of the automobile greatly increased the demand for petroleum.

Usage tips *Advent* is usually followed by an *of* phrase.

2. **ambiguous** *adj.* Having more than one possible meaning

The sentence *It's hard to say* is **ambiguous,** with different meanings in different contexts.

Parts of speech ambiguity *n,* ambiguously *adv*

3. **connotation** *n.* A meaning implied, not stated directly

When my boss says, "Thank you," the **connotation** is that she's done talking and I should leave.

Parts of speech connote *v*

4. **decipher** *v.* To figure out the meaning, even though it is written in a code or an unknown language

The Rosetta Stone helped archaeologists **decipher** ancient Egyptian writing.

Usage tips A cipher is a code or puzzle; *decipher* means "solve a puzzle written in code."

5. **denote** *v.* To mean something clearly and directly

An "X" next to a name on this list **denotes** a person who has been chosen for the soccer team.

Parts of speech denotation *n*

LIVEWORKSHEETS

6. **illiterate** *adj.* Unable to read

In many villages nearly everyone was **illiterate** and unschooled, and the few who could read held great power.

Parts of speech illiterate *n,* illiteracy *n*

7. **ingenious** *adj.* Very clever and imaginative

Ann thought up an **ingenious** way to keep other people from accidentally taking her pens.

Parts of speech ingenuity *n,* ingeniously *adv*

8. **inscription** *n.* Something written into a piece of rock or metal

The **inscription** on my ring says "August 1," because that was the day of our wedding.

Parts of speech inscribe *v*

9. **phonetic** *adj.* Related to the sounds in a language

Children learning to write often make up **phonetic** spellings, based on the way a word sounds.

Parts of speech phonetics *n,* phonetically *adv*

10. **symbolic** *adj.* Acting as a sign for some other thing or idea

Since the 1970s, yellow ribbons have been **symbolic** of hope that someone will return from a dangerous situation.

Usage tips *Symbolic* is often followed by an *of* phrase indicating the meaning of a symbol.

Parts of speech symbolize *v,* symbol *n,* symbolically *adv*

TOEFL Prep I Find the word or phrase that is closest in meaning to each word in the left-hand column. Write the letter in the blank.

_____ 1. advent	(a) approach or arrival
_____ 2. decipher	(b) newly invented in a clever way
_____ 3. ingenious	(c) to figure out the meaning
_____ 4. inscription	(d) related to spoken sounds
_____ 5. phonetic	(e) something written into a hard surface

TOEFL Prep II Complete each sentence by filling in the blank with the best word from the list. Change the form of the word if necessary. Use each word only once.

ambiguous ***connotation*** ***denote*** ***illiterate*** ***symbolic***

1. If my father told me to be quiet, the _____ was "I have a headache."

LIVEWORKSHEETS

2. The president's response, "Wait and see," was _____, meaning that perhaps he would take action, perhaps not.

3. In English writing, a mark called an apostrophe usually _____ a missing letter, as in *isn't* for *is not*.

4. A circle with a plus attached (♀) is _____ of "woman" and of the planet Venus.

5. Farley was a poor, _____ boy from a remote area who later taught himself to read and write.

TOEFL Success Read the passage to review the vocabulary you have learned. Answer the questions that follow.

Johannes Gutenberg's *ingenious* use of movable type in his printing press had a wide range of effects on European societies. **Most obviously,** readers no longer had to *decipher* odd handwriting, with *ambiguous* lettering, in order to read a written work. Gutenberg gave each letter standard forms, a move that had *connotations* far beyond the printing business. The *inscriptions* on tombstones and roadside mileposts, for example, could now be standardized. The cost of books decreased. Even *illiterate* people benefited indirectly from the *advent* of this invention, as the general level of information in society increased. However, Gutenberg's press was of limited use for languages that used picture-like symbols for writing instead of a *phonetic* system. Systems of *symbolic* pictographs, each of which *denotes* a word, require many thousands of characters to be cast into lead type by the printer. Phonetic systems, like the Latin alphabet, use the same few characters, recombined in thousands of ways to make different words.

***Bonus Structure*—Most obviously** *introduces an easy-to-see effect and implies that less-clear effects will come later.*

1. According to this reading, how did the invention of the printing press benefit illiterate people?
   a. It helped them learn to read.
   b. It raised the level of information in a society.
   c. It lowered the cost of books.
   d. It saved them from having to read ambiguous handwriting.

2. Why was Gutenberg's press not very practical for languages that use picture-like symbols?
   a. because character-based languages are made of pictographs
   b. because phonetic alphabets are clearer
   c. because there are too many characters to make movable type for each one
   d. because Gutenberg was European, so he didn't know any character-based languages

LIVEWORKSHEETS

LESSON 39

Entertainment

Target Words

1. amateurish
2. cast
3. charismatic
4. gala
5. hilarious
6. improvisation
7. incompetent
8. medium
9. skit
10. zeal

Definitions and Samples

1. **amateurish** *adj.* Not good enough to be the work of professionals

   Whoever painted this room did an **amateurish** job, with all sorts of uneven edges.

   Parts of speech amateur *n,* amateurishly *adv*

2. **cast** *n.* The group of actors in a play, movie, television show, etc.

   Some viewers mistakenly start thinking that a TV show's **cast** members are really the characters they play.

   Usage tips In U.S. English, *cast* is singular. In some other varieties of English it is plural.

   Parts of speech cast *v*

3. **charismatic** *adj.* Extremely attractive and charming

   Because of the sparkle in his eye and his confident style, John F. Kennedy was a **charismatic** leader.

   Parts of speech charisma *n,* charismatically *adv*

4. **gala** *adj.* Expensive, elaborately arranged, and full of celebration

   A college graduation party should be a **gala** affair, not a backyard barbecue.

   Usage tips *Gala* is somewhat old-fashioned, far more common in print than in speech.

   Parts of speech gala *n*

5. **hilarious** *adj.* Very funny

   In my opinion, the most **hilarious** character on television was Basil Fawlty.

   Parts of speech hilarity *n*

6. **improvisation** *n.* Inventing a solution to an unexpected problem

   Boy Scouts take pride in their **improvisation** when faced with trouble during a camping trip.

   Parts of speech improvise *v,* improvisational *adj*

LIVEWORKSHEETS

7. **incompetent** *adj.* Unskilled; lacking the ability to perform a task

Because we hired an **incompetent** builder to replace our roof, we now have leaks everywhere.

Usage tips Usually, *incompetent* implies that someone tries to do something but fails.

Parts of speech incompetence *n,* incompetently *adv*

8. **medium** *n.* A channel or way for a meaning to be expressed

Watercolor art is often considered childish, but some artists have achieved great things working in that **medium.**

Usage tips The plural of *medium* is *media.*

9. **skit** *n.* A short, informal play

Marnie and Chris spent a long time practicing their **skit** for the school show.

10. **zeal** *n.* Enthusiasm; a deep determination to do well

Unfortunately, Tom's **zeal** to become a rock star distracted him from his studies.

Usage tips *Zeal* is often followed by *to* plus a verb or by a *for* phrase.

Parts of speech zealot *n,* zealous *adj*

TOEFL Prep I Find the word or phrase that is closest in meaning to each word in the left-hand column. Write the letter in the blank.

_____ 1. amateurish	(a) group of people in a movie
_____ 2. cast	(b) very funny
_____ 3. hilarious	(c) unable to perform a task
_____ 4. incompetent	(d) enthusiasm
_____ 5. zeal	(e) not like professionals

TOEFL Prep II Complete each sentence by filling in the blank with the best word from the list. Change the form of the word if necessary. Use each word only once.

charismatic *gala* *improvisation* *medium* *skit*

1. The sixth-grade class put on a little _____ about Thanksgiving Day.
2. The year ended with a _____ celebration featuring a professional orchestra.
3. Gena's skills at _____ saved the play when she forgot her real lines.
4. Television is a passive _____ because it demands no input from the viewer.
5. Movie stars that are especially _____ often take advantage of their charm to go into politics.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

TOEFL Success Read the passage to review the vocabulary you have learned. Answer the questions that follow.

When the artistic *medium* of theater falls into the hands of college students, the results can be unpredictable. At one college, we saw Shakespeare's *Hamlet* done as musical theater. The idea was bad to start out with, and the actual play was *amateurish*, bordering on *incompetent*. The *cast* did not understand the tragic power of the play. Their *improvisation* when they forgot their lines was silly and inappropriate. The costumes and set design looked homemade, like something from an elementary-school *skit*. Three months later, **however,** this same group of students did a great job with the comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Surprisingly enough, the actors were *charismatic*, played their parts with *zeal*, and achieved a *hilarious* result. It was no *gala* event, but we still felt that it was one of the best performances we had seen.

Bonus Structure— **However** *indicates a change in focus.*

1. What word best describes the author's opinion of the student performance of *Hamlet?*
   a. incompetent
   b. charismatic
   c. hilarious
   d. full of zeal

2. What is the author's opinion of student performances in general?
   a. Students should not perform Shakespeare's plays.
   b. Sometimes student productions are good, and other times they are not.
   c. All student shows are amateurish.
   d. Student performances should be gala events.

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