Inference

Making an inference involves using what you know to make a guess about what you don't know or reading between the lines. Readers who make inferences use the clues in the text along with their own experiences to help them figure out what is not directly said, making the text personal and memorable.

Simple Definitions of Inference

The word "inference" is a noun that describes an intellectual process. The basic definition is:

"A conclusion drawn from two or more available facts."

Scientific Definition of Inference

In science, there are a few different types of inferences, but in general an inference is:

"An educated guess made through observation."

Literary Definition of Inference

When you are reading, you can make inferences based on information the author provides.

The literary definition of "inference" is more specifically:

"Using clues provided by the author to figure things out."

Everyday Examples of Inferences

You might not realize how often you derive conclusions from indications in your everyday life. These inferences help you make decisions about things like what you'll say or how you'll act in a given situation.

- Sally arrives at home at 4:30 and knows that her mother does not get off of work until 5. Sally also sees that the lights are off in their house.

  Sally can infer that her mother is not yet home.

- Sherry's toddler is in bed upstairs. She hears a bang and crying.

  Sherry can infer that her toddler is hurt or scared.

- John hears a smoke alarm next door and smells burnt bacon.

John can infer that his neighbor burnt her breakfast.

- Jennifer hears her mailbox close and her dog is barking.

   Jennifer can infer that the postal carrier has delivered her mail.

- Norman sees cookie crumbs on the floor and chocolate around his son's mouth.

   Norman can infer that his son ate a cookie.

Inference vs. Observation

Many people find it hard to tell the difference between "inference" and "observation." They are both nouns, but making an inference is a process and making an observation is not. [An observation is](#) something you notice, witness, or see. An inference is something you conclude by putting together different pieces of evidence.