

Word choice can have a massive impact on your writing.

Words are like ingredients: even a small change in the recipe can affect the finished dish.

"They had a warm laugh"

But what if "they had a hearty laugh"?

Even though these sentences pretty much tell us the same thing, the words have different effects.

'Warm' suggests the laugh is friendly.

'Hearty' suggests it is wholesome, passionate and sincere.

When you choose a word you need to think about its denotation.

That's what it literally means.

But you should also think about its connotations - ideas or feelings that the word might suggest or hint at.

"Feeling dizzy, she slid her hand along her head"

This just tells us what happened. But what if:

"Feeling dizzy, she slid her hand along her skull"

The skull is the bone structure in your head. This is the denotation - what it definitely is.

But the connotations of skull are fear, mortality and even death.

These connotations suggest that the dizziness she is experiencing is serious.

In the poem 'The Circle', Don Patterson watches his son painting the planets in the solar system.

"He draws around his upturned cup, his hand shakes, and he screws it up."

Patterson could have easily written "he messes it up" but "screws it up" is a far more interesting choice.

These words are really informal compared to his word choice in the rest of the poem.

This helps him capture the reality and rawness of a young boy's frustration.

At the same time, “screw” suggests a circular motion, another reference to circular shapes within the poem.

It also suggests scrunching up paper and throwing it away.

Word choice is a really important part of writing.

It’s an invaluable part of writing.

It’s crucial!