

# Semiotics vocabulary

Applied Communications Theory  
Kelly Ludwig, assistant professor  
KCAI Graphic Design

**Semiotics** - The principal study of graphic design and visual communication. The study of signs and symbols, their use, interpretation and meanings. How meaning is created, not what is created

**Syntax** - the hardware aspect of language. It introduces us to structure, how language should be formed and how culture sets up and eventually codifies things, like grammar or rules of proper communication (sentence structures like nouns, verbs, etc.).

**Semantics** - the language software. The way we create meaning and the way we create signs and signifiers – icons, indexes and symbols.

**Pragmatics** - the study of the ways in which signs are used and interpreted; the context in which language is used and the function of language – the everyday way we use words and images to communicate. Basically, how do they function and in what settings do they function properly?

**Sign** - the smallest unit of meaning. Representation of communication. Anything that can be used to communicate (or to tell a lie).

**Signifier** - Visual representation of an idea; any material thing that signifies, e.g., words on a page, a facial expression, an image. (the form in which it takes)

**Signified** - Concept that is being represented; the concept that a signifier refers to (the concept it represents)

**Icon** - Signs where the signifier resembles the signified, e.g., a picture.

**Index** - Representation of a signified concept with relatable connection without direct replication. Signs where the signifier is caused by the signified, e.g., smoke signifies fire.

**Symbol** - Non-logical representation of signified concept learnt through cultural assimilation. Signs where the relation between signifier and signified is purely conventional and culturally specific, e.g., most words.

**Code** - A code is a specific set of signs agreed upon by a culture. Set of paradigms at either a fixed or non-fixed ratio. A combination of semiotic systems, a super system, that function as general maps of meaning, belief systems about oneself and others, which imply views and attitudes about how the world is and/or ought to be. Codes are where semiotics and social structure and values connect.

**Digital code** - a collection of signs where each unit of the set is clearly different from each other (alphabet or musical notation)

**Analog code** - an open model or set of codes with unlimited choices and unclear divisions between the units.

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**Denotation** - the most basic or literal (primary) meaning of a sign, e.g., the word "rose" signifies a particular kind of flower.

**Connotation** - the secondary, cultural meanings of signs; or "signifying signs," signs that are used as signifiers for a secondary meaning, e.g., the word "rose" signifies passion.

**Polysemy** - Idea of multiple connotations/interpretations of a sign

**Syntagm** - A linear organization of signs, where signs get meaning from their sequential order, e.g., grammar or the sequence of events that make up a story.

**Paradigm** - Form of organization of signs (collection) where signs get meaning from their association with other signs

**Myths** - a combination of paradigms and syntagms that make up an oft-told story with elaborate cultural associations, e.g., the cowboy myth, the romance myth.

**Ideologies** - codes that reinforce or are congruent with structures of power. Ideology works largely by creating forms of "common sense," of the taken-for-granted in everyday life.

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**Convention** - A cultural agreement about what a sign means, or how we should respond to it.

**Motivation** - how much the signifier describes the concept, or signified. So, it's about that relationship about how close they are. A highly motivated sign is a very iconic one.

**Anchorage** - text that fixes the meaning of an image. (reinforces)

**Relay** - text that advances the image by supplying meanings not found in the image itself. (alters)

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**Ethos** -(Greek for 'character') refers to the trustworthiness or credibility of the writer or speaker. Ethos is the greek word for "character", so it is persuading by the character of the author. It includes factors like credibility, respectability, likability. The author's reputation is independent of the message [are they an accepted authority on the subject?]

**Extrinsic ethos** - the reputation or character of the author that precedes them. it is based on prior knowledge and/or assumptions we make about the author

**Intrinsic ethos** - the impression created by the text itself when you encounter it.

**Pathos** - (Greek for both "suffering" and "experience.") It is persuasion by appealing to our emotions. The words empathy and pathetic are derived from pathos. In design it means persuading by appealing to the reader's emotions.

**Logos** - (Greek for 'word') Persuasion through the use of reasoning and logic.

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**Trope** - A trope is a figurative or metaphoric use of a word, expression or image.

**Rhetoric** - the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.

**Antithesis** - Juxtaposing two ideas that communicate opposite ideas.

**Hyperbole** - Exaggerating an idea for emphasis.

**Irony** - Juxtaposing two ideas that communicate opposite ideas. The expression of one's meaning by using imagery that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect.

**Metaphor** - a kind of connotation that identifies one thing as being the same as some unrelated other thing, thus strongly implying the similarities between the two. A figure of speech that identifies one thing as being the same as some unrelated other thing, thus strongly implying the similarities between the two.

**Metonymy** - a kind of connotation where in one sign is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of Washington for the United States government or of the sword for military power. It is used to represent a totality. A figure of speech in which a thing or concept is not called by its own name, but by the name of something intimately associated with that thing or concept.

**Parody** - Exaggerated imitation for comical purposes

**Pun** - Using a word or phrase that has two meanings.

**Personification** - Imposing human-like characteristics on inanimate objects.

**Synecdoche** - a kind of connotation in which a part is used for the whole.

**Simile** - Comparing two things or ideas, usually by saying "like" or "as."