

'The **connotations** of a particular word or name are the ideas, qualities, places, etc. which it makes you think of.' (*COBUILD Dictionary*). The following example (from a Research Proposal in Islamic Theology by a Malaysian student) shows the importance of connotation in the choice of vocabulary:

Original	Revision
... the believer's incessant devotion to God the believer's steadfast devotion to God ...

During one-to-one revision sessions the computer is always switched on, with MicroConcord loaded, so doubtful lexical or syntactic choices can be checked instantly. In this case, the strongly negative connotation of **incessant** came out very clearly (extract from KWIC concordance shown below):

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1) establishment responded to Hoyle's incessant attacks by giving his colleague Wil
2) e and the mandolin sounded like an incessant bar-room bore. Harris has never bee
3) shells for every landmark and the incessant barking of the security guards' dog
4) sonally motivated. But despite the incessant bickering among his coalition partn
5) tches' and `niggas', has attracted incessant, bitter attack not only from the w
6) laxing if it weren't for Ms Brat's incessant boasts about how much dope she smok
7) n either. Someone shouted over the incessant booing at the end of Home Chat, 'We
8) re thrown up by the market, as its incessant changes revolutionise our lives in
9) pondents claimed to be fed up with incessant coverage of the family's troubles.
10) ks feel they have been the butt of incessant criticism from their European allie
11) ealism" of other soaps, with their incessant diet of violence, drugs and crime.
12) of order and unity, in which these incessant disagreements about Europe have cea
13) l claimants, having contended with incessant fighting and drugs at the hotel he
14) e. Most people got fed up with the incessant rain and headed home for their annu
15) d by the time the music stops, its incessant rhythm is beginning to work into yo
16) Villagers now have to put up with incessant road noise, made more intolerable b
17) and old boots". Max was an almost incessant smoker and he died after a protract
18) other bloody conflicts, an almost incessant succession of famines and other nat
19) departure was greeted by an almost incessant torrent of abuse from the home fans
20) for me. The demanding routine and incessant travelling were an increasing burde

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What word would avoid the negative connotations of **incessant**? After a little discussion we hit on **steadfast** which, collocating with nouns such as **adherence**, **believer**, and **commitment** seemed to have exactly the right positive connotation for this context:

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1) One you could call commitment - a steadfast adherence to an ideal or cause. The
2) elated. The UVF remains strong and steadfast and will continue to be so. We have
3) reinty". But Quebec will now stand steadfast behind its new leader, n'est-ce pas
4) open spaces? Surely even the most steadfast believers can forgive Him for wanti
5) e to his family's tradition with a steadfast commitment to modern democratic val
6) of public sympathy. But O'Keeffe's steadfast loyalty to her informants quickly m
7) strong and funny. He was the most steadfast of friends. April sun kissing the b
8) to work up to 40 hours. Zwickel's steadfast opposition to Gesamtmetall's propos
9) itment and unity of purpose remain steadfast. Our commitment to peace is also a
10) rhetoric, despite his government's steadfast support in practice for a mixed eco

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Clearly, information on authentic usage such as this from a concordancer is invaluable for the writer. A good dictionary often hints at features of connotation, but even if the examples given are reliable there may not be enough to form the basis of a trustworthy generalisation. For example, COBUILD gives only 2 examples for **incessant** - **incessant warfare** and **incessant demand for change**, and 2 for **steadfast** - **steadfast in his praise** and **steadfast dedication**. The dictionary examples might well give the learner a 'feel' for the connotations of the two words: but those connotations 'leap' unforgettably from the concordances.

Soon after I wrote this first Kibbitzer, it occurred to me that **unceasing** would have been a good alternative to **steadfast**: in addition, a colleague has recently suggested that **constant** would have had the appropriate connotations. What I might well have done, of course, was to concordance the word **devotion**. 568 citations from the Times and Guardian yield the following adjectives, all of which would have been worth discussing as potential replacements for incessant:

1 Porter values anything above her unceasing devotion to style, it is her passion for power
2 on homes. And let's not forget the undying devotion of his very punny comrades-in-arms, C
3 it is due in no small part to his undying devotion to the ANC, which has come before eve
4 stes no opportunity to declare her undying devotion to the NHS, is cast as the accountant
5 t most of the time declaring their undying devotion to Blue Peter. Robert Jones, the
comm.
6 o has died aged 47, pursued with unflinching devotion a form of realist painting that flew
7 reality are united in a subtle, unflagging devotion to painting as a humane art. As a man,
8 d despair, of hidden talent and unflagging devotion. And also of getting the washing in w
9 ly virtues. That these include unflinching devotion to Queen and country goes without say
10 only mission in life was their unflinching devotion to the cause." The tactful omission o
11 and LPs by Quintessence - their unswerving devotion to the four pillars of Hinduism (no m
12 his noble warrior purity, his unwavering devotion to his men and his wife begin to grat
13 18 months ago his outspoken and unwavering devotion to "le beau jeu" resulted in his bein

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