Imply or infer?

Imply and infer both refer to communication that is not explicit or direct, but they describe different points of view.

To imply something is to express something indirectly or to say something without explicitly stating it.¹

Example:

By commenting on the study’s large sample size, the authors implied that previous studies had been underpowered.

To infer something is to deduce it or figure it out, or to draw a conclusion from information that may or may not be implied.²

Examples:

Because the data were incomplete, we were unable to infer a causal relationship.

It may help to remember that speakers (or writers) imply, while listeners (or readers) infer.³

Betsy’s mumbled excuse implied that she didn’t want to join us for lunch.

We inferred from Betsy’s mumbled excuse that she didn’t want to join us for lunch.

References

1. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. Springfield, MA:
Merriam-Webster; 2003:624.


--Amy Ninetto

Image Credit: © Can Stock Photo / monkeybusiness

Copyright © 2020, All rights reserved. Research Medical Library, Scientific Publications Services.