

Word for Word

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.

2. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. Springfield, MA:

Merriam-Webster; 2003:639.

3. Dreyer B. Dreyer's English: An Utterly Correct Guide to Clarity and Style.

New York: Random House; 2019:191.

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