

12 Words for describing change

Learning time expressions and verbs for describing change | Pronouncing consonants clearly | Using words with positive and negative connotations

Vocabulary

Verbs associated with change:

- **abandon (abandons, abandoning, abandoned)**
VERB If you **abandon** an activity or piece of work, you stop doing it before it is finished.
▪ *The authorities have abandoned any attempt to distribute food.* ▪ *The scheme's investors, fearful of bankruptcy, decided to abandon the project.*
- **adjust (adjusts, adjusting, adjusted)**
VERB When you **adjust to** a new situation, you get used to it by changing your behaviour or your ideas. ▪ [+ to] *We are preparing our fighters to adjust themselves to civil society.* ▪ [+ to] *I felt I had adjusted to the idea of being a mother very well.*
- **alter (alters, altering, altered)**
VERB If something **alters** or if you **alter** it, it changes. ▪ *Little had altered in the village.* ▪ *attempts to genetically alter the caffeine content of coffee plants*
- **decline (declines, declining, declined)**
VERB If something **declines**, it becomes less in quantity, importance, or strength.
▪ [+ from] *The number of staff has declined from 217,000 to 114,000.* ▪ *Hourly output by workers declined 1.3% in the first quarter.*
▪ [V-ing] *a declining birth rate*
- **develop (develops, developing, developed)**
VERB When something **develops**, it grows or changes over a period of time and usually becomes more advanced, complete, or severe. ▪ *It's hard to say at this stage how the market will develop.* ▪ [+ into] *These clashes could develop into open warfare.*
- **diminish (diminishes, diminishing, diminished)**
VERB When something **diminishes**, or when something **diminishes** it, it becomes reduced in size, importance, or intensity.
▪ *The threat of nuclear war has diminished.*
▪ *Federalism is intended to diminish the power of the central state.* ▪ [V-ing] *Universities are facing grave problems because of diminishing resources.* ▪ *This could mean diminished public support for the war.*
- **evolve (evolves, evolving, evolved)**
VERB If something **evolves** or you **evolve** it, it gradually develops over a period of time into something different and usually more advanced. ▪ [+ into] *a tiny airline which eventually evolved into Pakistan International Airlines* ▪ [+ from] *Popular music evolved from folk songs.* ▪ *As medical knowledge evolves, beliefs change.*
- **modify (modifies, modifying, modified)**
VERB If you **modify** something, you change it slightly, usually in order to improve it.
▪ *The club members did agree to modify their recruitment policy.* ▪ *The plane was a modified version of the C-130.*
- **refine (refines, refining, refined)**
VERB If something such as a process, theory, or machine **is refined**, it is improved by having small changes made to it.

▪ *Surgical techniques are constantly being refined.* ▪ *Twentieth century botanists have continually refined these classifications.*

• **shift (shifts, shifting, shifted)**

VERB If someone's opinion, a situation, or a policy **shifts** or **is shifted**, it changes slightly. ▪ *Attitudes to mental illness have shifted in recent years.* ▪ *The emphasis should be shifted more towards Parliament.*

• **transform (transforms, transforming, transformed)**

VERB To **transform** something or someone means to change them completely and suddenly so that they are much better or more attractive. ▪ *The spread of the internet and mobile telephony have transformed society.* ▪ [+ into] *Yeltsin was committed to completely transforming Russia into a market economy.*

Nouns for periods of time:

• **century (centuries)**

1 NOUN A **century** is any period of a hundred years. ▪ *The drought there is the worst in a century.* ▪ [+ of] *This may be ending centuries of tradition.*

2 NOUN A **century** is a period of a hundred years that is used when stating a date. For example, the 19th century was the period

from 1801 to 1900. ▪ *celebrated figures of the late eighteenth century* ▪ *a 17th-century merchant's house*

• **decade (decades)**

NOUN A **decade** is a period of ten years, especially one that begins with a year ending in 0, for example 1980 to 1989. ▪ *the last decade of the nineteenth century*

• **generation (generations)**

NOUN A **generation** is all the people in a group or country who are of a similar age, especially when they are considered as having the same experiences or attitudes. [+ of] *the younger generation of Party members* ▪ *David Mamet has long been considered the leading American playwright of his generation.*

• **millennium (millenniums or millennia)**

NOUN A **millennium** is a period of one thousand years, especially one which begins and ends with a year ending in '000', for example the period from the year 1000 to the year 2000. [FORMAL] ▪ *But then many Japanese companies are unsure whether they will survive until the new millennium at all.* ▪ *France begins celebrating the millennium an hour before Britain, and Eurotunnel wants to make sure supplies are maintained.*

Practice exercises



1 Listen to exam candidates 1–6 answering questions about changes. In the left-hand column, write which verb a–f is used by each candidate 1–6.

Candidate 1 _____	a abandon _____
Candidate 2 _____	b adjust _____
Candidate 3 _____	c decline _____
Candidate 4 _____	d develop _____
Candidate 5 _____	e evolve _____
Candidate 6 _____	f modify _____

Exam tip: Similar words can have a positive, negative or neutral meaning, depending on the context they are used in.

Example: the words *intricate*, *complicated* and *complex* can all be used to describe something that has many parts. However:

Intricate usually has a more positive connotation and is often used to describe decorative objects:

The fireplace was carved with intricate patterns.

Complicated usually has a more negative connotation and is often used to describe situations that are difficult to understand or deal with:

The situation in Lebanon is very complicated.

Complex is generally more neutral in tone and is often used to describe things that are challenging to understand:

These complex machines can perform a variety of tasks.

Learning to use words with positive, negative, and neutral connotations can help you express your ideas and attitudes more effectively.



2

Listen again to candidates 1–6 in Exercise 1 on Track 20. Indicate whether the verbs a–f in Exercise 1 have a positive, negative or neutral connotation in that context by writing: +, – or 0 next to each verb.

3

The words below all refer to periods of time. Rewrite them in order beginning with the shortest time period and ending with the longest.

century decade generation millennium year



4

Verbs 1–5 below can also refer to changes. Indicate whether they usually have a positive, negative or neutral connotation by writing +, – or 0 in the spaces. Then listen to speakers 1–5 to check your answers. Listen again and write the time expression each speaker uses which includes the words from exercise 3.

word	connotation	time expression
1 alter		<i>five centuries ago</i>
2 diminish		
3 refine		
4 shift		
5 transform		

5

Use words from exercises 1–4 to talk about changes in your own country. Use words with a positive connotation to talk about positive changes. Use words with a negative connotation to talk about negative changes. Use neutral verbs for changes that you feel are neither positive nor negative.