Writing Tip of the Week

IMPLY AND INFER

Writers sometimes mistakenly use the word “infer” when they really mean “imply.” Although the two words are related, they are used differently. To **imply** means to suggest or express indirectly. To **infer** means to deduce, conclude, or assume.

Thus, use **imply** when the actor is sending an indirect message; use **infer** when the actor is receiving, or drawing inferences from, someone else’s message. The person who **implies** something is the sender of the message, whereas the person who **infers** something is the recipient of the message.

- The detective **implied** (suggested) that the defendant was guilty by testifying, “He ran when he saw me, didn’t he?”

- The detective **inferred** (deduced or concluded) from the defendant’s demeanor that he was hiding something.

- During the settlement negotiations, the plaintiff’s lawyer **implied** (suggested) that his client would consider a lesser settlement if the defendant publicly apologized.

- When the victim filed a civil suit, the defendant’s counsel **inferred** (deduced or concluded) that the victim was no longer committed to pursuing criminal charges.