Slang is an integral part of language in the twenty-first century. Young people in particular are highly creative in the way they invent and use new slang terms. Without an understanding of slang, communicating with those around us would be difficult. In fact, slang allows people to connect on a deeper level. That's why people who are learning a new language often try to "pick up" a few slang terms early on—it helps them feel like authentic speakers of the language and part of their new second-language community.

Work with a partner. List as many slang terms that you can think of. Then guess their meanings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slang term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arm candy</td>
<td>an attractive person who accompanies somebody to public gatherings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choose three of the slang terms from your list and use them in sentences.
A. The boldfaced words are from this unit’s lecture on slang and language change. Listen to each sentence. Then guess the meaning of the boldfaced words. Work with a partner.

1. **Attitudes** toward slang vary widely. While some people approve of it, others are neutral or disapprove of it strongly.

2. Language never stays the same for long; it’s **constantly** changing.

3. Slang helps us to **construct** friendships by showing others that we “speak their language” and are therefore part of their group.

4. The world is continually **evolving** thanks to the development of new and better technology.

5. Young people play an important role in **expanding** language by adding a variety of slang and new meanings.

6. People often try to create an **identity** for themselves by wearing a particular style of clothing or speaking in a certain way.

7. Many people think that a desire to be different is an **inevitable** part of teenage development, a natural phase teens can’t avoid.

8. Language is a fascinating and unique **phenomenon**. How human language distinguishes us from other animals has been studied for years.

9. For some people, teenagers’ use of slang and other forms of “bad” language **reinforces** the idea that they are rebellious and do not want to conform.

10. The use of slang was not always as **widespread** as it is today; nowadays most people use it quite freely.

B. Now choose the best definition for each boldfaced word.

1. **attitudes** vary
   a. ways of behaving  
   b. personalities  
   c. opinions and feelings

2. **constantly** change
   a. all the time  
   b. unwillingly  
   c. without thinking

3. **construct** friendships
   a. search for  
   b. create or build  
   c. understand the meaning of

4. **continually evolving**
   a. developing  
   b. becoming worse  
   c. going out of fashion

5. **expanding** language
   a. showing off  
   b. checking  
   c. increasing

6. create an **identity**
   a. a facial expression  
   b. a quality that makes someone distinct  
   c. a sense of interest
7. an inevitable part
   a. unavoidable
   b. important
   c. difficult

8. a phenomenon
   a. a human characteristic
   b. a remarkable thing
   c. an idea

9. reinforces the idea
   a. devalues
   b. supports
   c. creates

10. not as widespread as
    a. important
    b. popular
    c. common

C. INTERACT WITH VOCABULARY! Work with a partner. Cover Group A as your partner reads sentences 1–5. Listen and write the missing words in Group B. Your partner corrects your answers. Switch roles for 6–10.

Group A

1. People always try to adapt to their communities.
2. Slang breeds in groups who don’t want to be understood.
3. We show our beliefs by using particular language.
4. Slang is the focus of a lot of language research.
5. Many parents aren’t in tune with their teenagers’ interests.
6. New language tends to be closely associated with youth.
7. Some slang is exclusive to particular communities.
8. Experts in language are often fascinated by slang.
9. Language is crucial to our integration into society.
10. Some social groups are made distinct by their unique use of language.

Group B

1. People always try to adapt _______ their communities.
2. Slang breeds _______ groups who don’t want to be understood.
3. We show our beliefs _______ using particular language.
4. Slang is the focus _______ a lot of language research.
5. Many parents aren’t in tune _______ their teenagers’ interests.
6. New language tends to be closely associated _______ youth.
7. Some slang is exclusive _______ particular communities.
8. Experts _______ language are often fascinated by slang.
9. Language is crucial to our integration _______ society.
10. Some social groups are made distinct _______ their unique use of language.
SEQUENCE MARKERS TO ORGANIZE YOUR NOTES

Lecturers will often use sequence markers to signal when they are about to introduce the next point or part of a lecture or the next item in a list. Being able to identify these markers can help you distinguish different ideas and better organize your notes. Some commonly used sequence markers include the following:

To start/begin with, ... Let's move on to...
First, ...; Second, ...; Third, ... Another point/idea ...
Next, ...
Then ...
Moving on ...

A. Listen to this excerpt from a lecture on language. What sequence markers do you hear? Take notes below on the four reasons the speaker gives.

B. Compare your list with a partner.

Reasons people adjust the way they speak:

1) 
2) 
3) 
4)
LISTEN to the lecture

BEFORE YOU LISTEN

You are about to listen to this unit’s lecture on slang. Why do you think people use slang?

LISTEN FOR MAIN IDEAS

A. Close your book. Listen to the lecture and take notes.
B. Use your notes. Decide if the statements below are T (true) or F (false), according to the lecture. Correct any false statements.

1. We cannot stop language change from happening.
2. Slang only breeds among deprived and secretive groups.
3. Slang takes away people’s identity.
4. Well-educated, successful people rarely use slang.
5. Slang allows people to share experiences.
6. Slang is fun.
7. New technology has led to a decrease in the use of slang.
8. Slang has not yet become the subject of serious academic study.

LISTEN FOR DETAILS

A. Close your book. Listen to the lecture again. Add details to your notes and correct any mistakes.
B. Use your notes. Choose the word or phrase that best completes each idea, based on the lecture.

1. Today the association of slang with underground groups is ________________.
   a. weaker  
   b. the same as before  
   c. stronger  
   d. much stronger
2. One use of slang is to ______________ understanding.
   a. improve  c. prevent
   b. create  d. check

3. People who are “out-group” are ________________.
   a. excluded  c. opponents of slang
   b. respected  d. poor users of slang

4. Slang can give people status if they ________________.
   a. know the latest slang terms  c. avoid bad slang
   b. use it frequently  d. know how to use it

5. S. I. Hayakawa describes slang as “the poetry of everyday ________________.”
   a. love  c. emotions
   b. life  d. feelings and beliefs

6. One of the richest sources of slang today is ________________.
   a. love and romance  c. new technology
   b. expressions of like and dislike  d. websites about slang

7. Most people believe that language and literacy are ________________.
   a. worsening  c. including more slang
   b. improving  d. becoming more creative

8. According to the lecture, slang ________________ considered taboo.
   a. used to be  c. is still
   b. was never  d. is increasingly

9. People who dislike slang often associate it with groups who are ________________ and ________________.
   a. uneducated / criminal  c. impolite / uneducated
   b. criminal / undesirable  d. undesirable / uneducated

10. The lecturer’s attitude toward language change is ________________.
    a. extremely negative  c. neutral
    b. negative  d. positive
TALK about the topic

A. Listen to the students talk about slang. Then read each question and check (~) who answers it.

1. “Well, he said that language change is inevitable, right?”
   - Mia
   - Manny
   - Hannah
   - River

2. “Is that how everyone took it?”
   - Mia
   - Manny
   - Hannah
   - River

3. “... If they can choose to change language by using slang, that means they can also choose not to use it, right?”
   - Mia
   - Manny
   - Hannah
   - River

4. “So, isn’t that a contradiction?”
   - Mia
   - Manny
   - Hannah
   - River

B. Listen to the discussion again. Listen closely for the comments below. Check (~) the discussion strategy the student uses.

1. Mia: “Yeah, OK. So what’s the confusion?”
   - Agreeing
   - Asking for clarification or confirmation
   - Paraphrasing

2. Manny: “It’s a choice, you’re saying.”
   - Agreeing
   - Asking for clarification or confirmation
   - Paraphrasing

3. River: “What he meant was that language change will happen generally.”
   - Agreeing
   - Asking for clarification or confirmation
   - Paraphrasing

4. Manny: “But it isn’t inevitable in any particular group... You’re right about that.”
   - Agreeing
   - Asking for clarification or confirmation
   - Paraphrasing

5. River: “Make sense?”
   - Agreeing
   - Asking for clarification or confirmation
   - Paraphrasing

C. In small groups, discuss one or more of these topics. Try to use the discussion strategies you have learned.
   - Do you think it’s possible to stop—or at least slow down—language change?
   - What changes have you noticed in the way language is used?
   - Why do some slang terms “hang around” for years while others don’t?
With a partner, review your notes from the lecture. Take turns explaining the ideas from the lecture. Try to use sequence markers like those in Focus Your Attention. Then complete these notes together.

Slang

Def. of:

Who uses:

Main function of:

4 Personal benefits of using:
  1)
  2)
  3)
  4)

3 Major inspirations for:
  1)
  2)
  3)

Attitudes toward:
How's your understanding of slang? Is it "the bomb"? Or is it "lame"?
Learn more slang terms and slang usage through the following listening, reading, and research project.

A. Listen as TV personality Jacky Giopoulos presents a brief report on IM slang. Then discuss these questions with your classmates.

1. How many text messages do you send a day?
2. What are some of the text-based slang terms you use in speech? Are there any particularly strange ones?

B. Do you think it is acceptable to use slang in written language, such as in school assignments, at the office, or in the press? Read the opinions of three professionals.

Jan Dickinson, high school teacher: I've been a teacher for thirty years and not a single day has passed when I haven't heard some form of slang. I've come to realize it's part of what makes these students who they are—fine. However, I never used to see slang in students' written work—it would've been unthinkable. Today, though, slang's creeping into nearly all student writing, and it worries me. We need a standard for written language, and it's a teacher's duty to uphold that standard. Once you accept any kind of slang, you're on a slippery slope.

Sir Peter Warwick, managing director of a sportswear chain: I strongly discourage the use of slang in anything other than informal office chat, and even then I expect staff to be discriminating. For example, if I'm showing a high-level business contact around, I don't want my staff using slang in front of them. In my view, it shows a lack of professionalism, and that reflects badly on the company. In terms of written business communications, slang is never acceptable—be it e-mail or official reports. Anyone found using slang in these contexts will be quickly reprimanded.

Melanie Droghba, newspaper columnist: In my view, as the attitude toward slang has changed in recent years, so has our paper's use of it. And that's as it should be; after all, it's important that the press mirror society. I don't believe it lowers standards; rather it helps us engage and relate to ordinary people—and that's our job.
Discuss the following questions with your classmates.

1. Do you think these three views are reasonable?

2. When do you think slang is acceptable in written communication?

C. Research two slang terms.

→ For each term, try to find out the following information:
   • the term’s origins
   • what the term means
   • how it has disappeared and reappeared over time (where relevant)
   • how its meaning has changed over time

→ As a class, compile your research.

→ Debate which terms should become “official” words in the English language.

→ Conclude by taking a vote on each one.