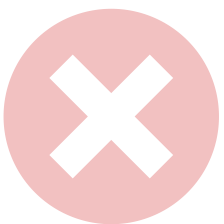


What is a Student-Friendly Definition?

“A student-friendly definition is written by an adult & is not constrained by space limitations, as a dictionary definition is.”
(Steele & Mills, 2011, p. 361)

A student-friendly definition uses simple **everyday language** rather than the sophisticated language often used in academic dictionaries.

An example of this contrast is shown below for the word ‘**borrow**’:



Dictionary Definition
“to take or obtain with the promise to return the same or an equivalent” (Dictionary.com)



Student-Friendly Definition
When you borrow something from someone, you take it & use it for some time & then give it back

By: Lindsay Desimone

Why Use Student-Friendly Definitions?

Research has shown that dictionary definitions are an ineffective means of expanding children’s vocabularies.
(Steele & Mills, 2011)

The issues with dictionary definitions:

(Beck et al., 2013)

Weak Differentiation

Dictionary definitions often fail to expose distinct differences between a word & its synonyms

Vague Language

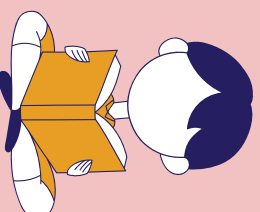
Dictionary definitions may use unclear language that does not depict a complete & accurate word meaning

Ambiguity

A child may misinterpret the true meaning of the word when “familiar words [are used] in unfamiliar ways” (p. 44)

Disconnected Information

Dictionary definitions often present multiple ideas separated by semi-colons, but they do not explain the relationship between these ideas

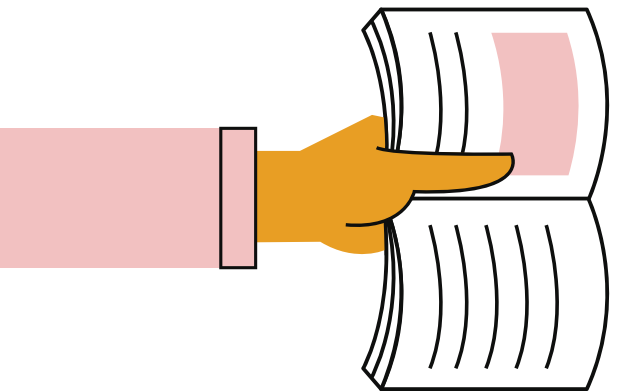


Student-friendly definitions avoid the problems listed above & are much more appropriate to use when teaching students new word meanings.



Check out [collinsdictionary.com](https://www.collinsdictionary.com) for student-friendly definitions in the primary & secondary dictionaries & modify as needed.

How to Create a Student-Friendly Definition



A Two-Step Process:

(Beck et al., 2013)

1 Think about the basis of the word & how it is most often used

What is the word's typical use in language?

Think of the example word 'disobey'...

Disobey is most often used to describe when a person or group of people do not follow the orders of another.

What is communicated when we use the word?

In addition to the denotative meaning of the word, think about the connotations associated with the word.

The denotative meaning of **disobey** is "failure to obey" (Dictionary.com) But what else is communicated when we use this term? For example:

- the person is likely disobeying someone in power
- it is often done purposefully as an act of rebellion

2 Describe the word's meaning using everyday language

Use accessible language

Explain the concept using an appropriate language level & complexity based on the student's abilities.

Avoid formal terms & instead use more casual language.

Ensure language chosen leads to the correct context

Returning to the dictionary definition of 'disobey': "failure to obey"... The student may tend to the word 'failure' & interpret a different meaning for 'disobey' than the intended one.

'Failure' suggests you try to do something but do not succeed in doing so; based on the dictionary definition, a student might interpret 'disobey' as: when you try to obey but do not succeed in doing so.

'Failure' creates the misconception that disobedience is unintentional.

Incorporate words like "something," "someone" or "describes"

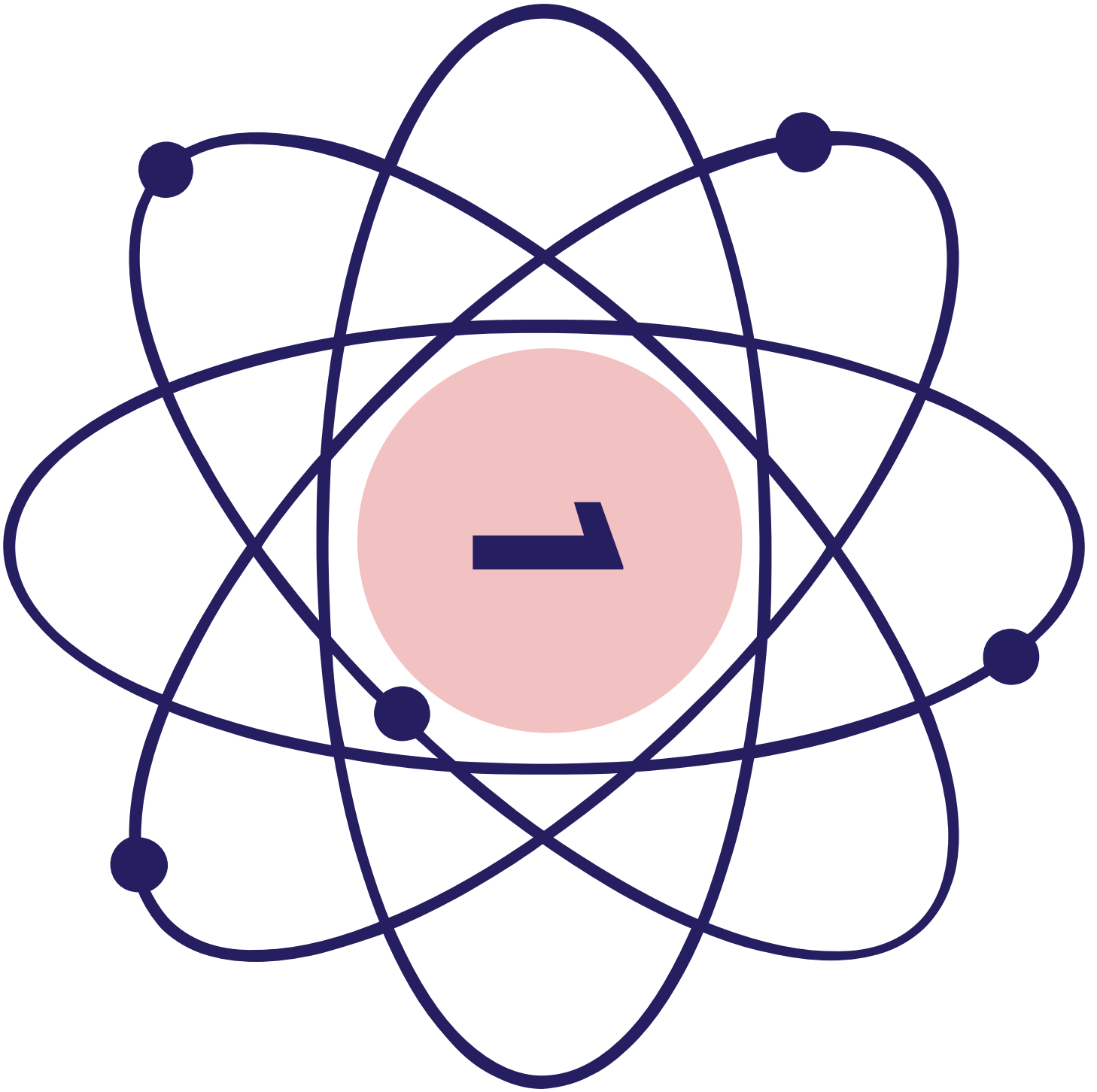
Student-friendly definition of 'disobey': When someone disobeys a person in charge, they purposefully do not do what they have been told to do.



Student-Friendly Dictionary of Vocabulary Words from the Grade 1-3 Science & Technology Ontario Curriculum (Ontario, 2007)



Many definitions were produced with reference
to the Collins Dictionary



GRADE 1

Design

to design something means to plan out what it should look like and do and how it should be made

Dormant

when a living thing, usually a plant seed, is dormant, it does not grow because it is in a bad environment but can start to grow once it is in a good environment

Energy

energy is the power that makes things happen like heat, light, sound or movement

Experiment

a test done, usually during science class, to see what the outcome is when you do a series of steps

Explore

to explore something means to study it in various ways and discover what it is like

Flexible

describes something that is easy to bend

Food

something that humans and other animals eat

Hibernate

when an animal hibernates, it does very little activity and is almost in a deep sleep throughout the winter

GRADE 1

Investigate

to investigate something means to find out more information about it

Needs

the things that humans, plants and animals require to live

Purpose

the purpose of doing something is the reason why you are doing it

Rigid

describes something that is very hard to bend

Smooth

something is smooth if it has no bumps, lumps or roughness

Solid

describes an object that is not a liquid or vapour and is usually hard

Space

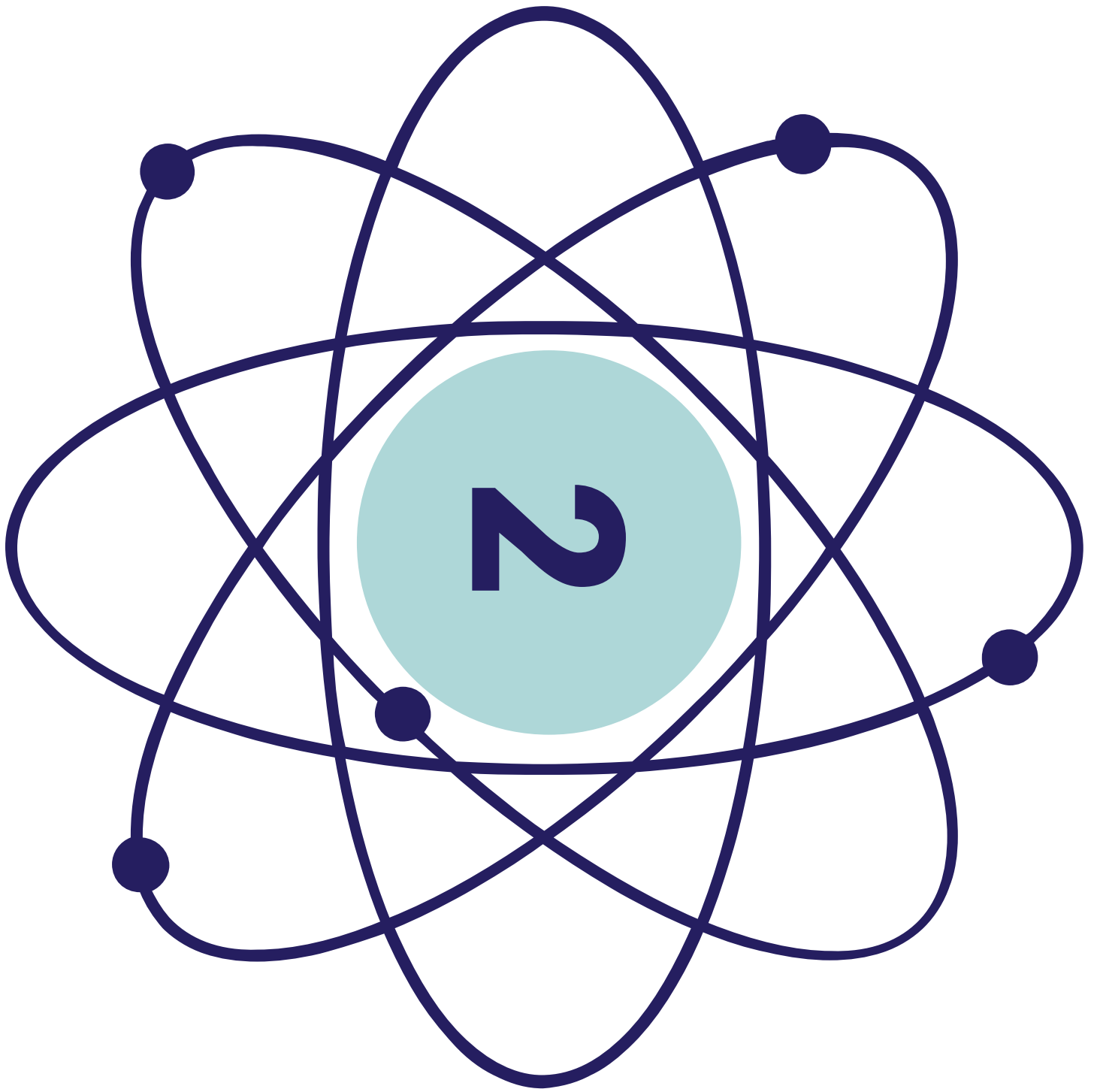
the place beyond earth where other planets and stars float in the air

Survival

describes an animal's ability to continue living despite threatening events

Temperature

describes how hot or cold something is; commonly used to describe how hot or cold it is outside



GRADE 2

Above

something is above you when it is high up over your head

Adaptation

a change that an animal makes to its appearance or activity in response to a change in its environment

Axle

a rod in the middle of a wheel that allows the wheel to spin around it

Beside

something is beside you when it is next to your right or left side

Body Coverings

anything that covers an animal's body, which includes things like fur, scales, and feathers

Classify

to classify something means to sort it into a group that shares something in common

Clear

something is clear when you can see through it like a window

Condensation

the small water droplets that form when a vapour touches a cool surface

GRADE 2

Evaporation

occurs when a liquid is heated and changes to a vapour that enters the air

Granular

describes something that is made of many tiny pieces, such as sand and sugar

Greasy

describes something that feels slippery because it is covered in grease

Hard

describes something that cannot be squished or bent easily

Inclined Plane

a surface that slopes upwards like a hill

Life Cycle

the life cycle of a living thing, such as a plant or animal, includes its stages of growth from its first day of life to its last

Liquid

a substance that flows and can be poured into a container

Migration

migration occurs when animals move from one place to another, usually during specific seasons, to remain healthy

GRADE 2

Opaque

something is opaque when you cannot see through it

Precipitation

precipitation occurs when water vapour in the sky forms clouds that release rain, snow or hail

Pull

to pull something means to move it towards you with force, or you could pull something behind you like a wagon

Push

to push something means to move it away from you with force

Runny

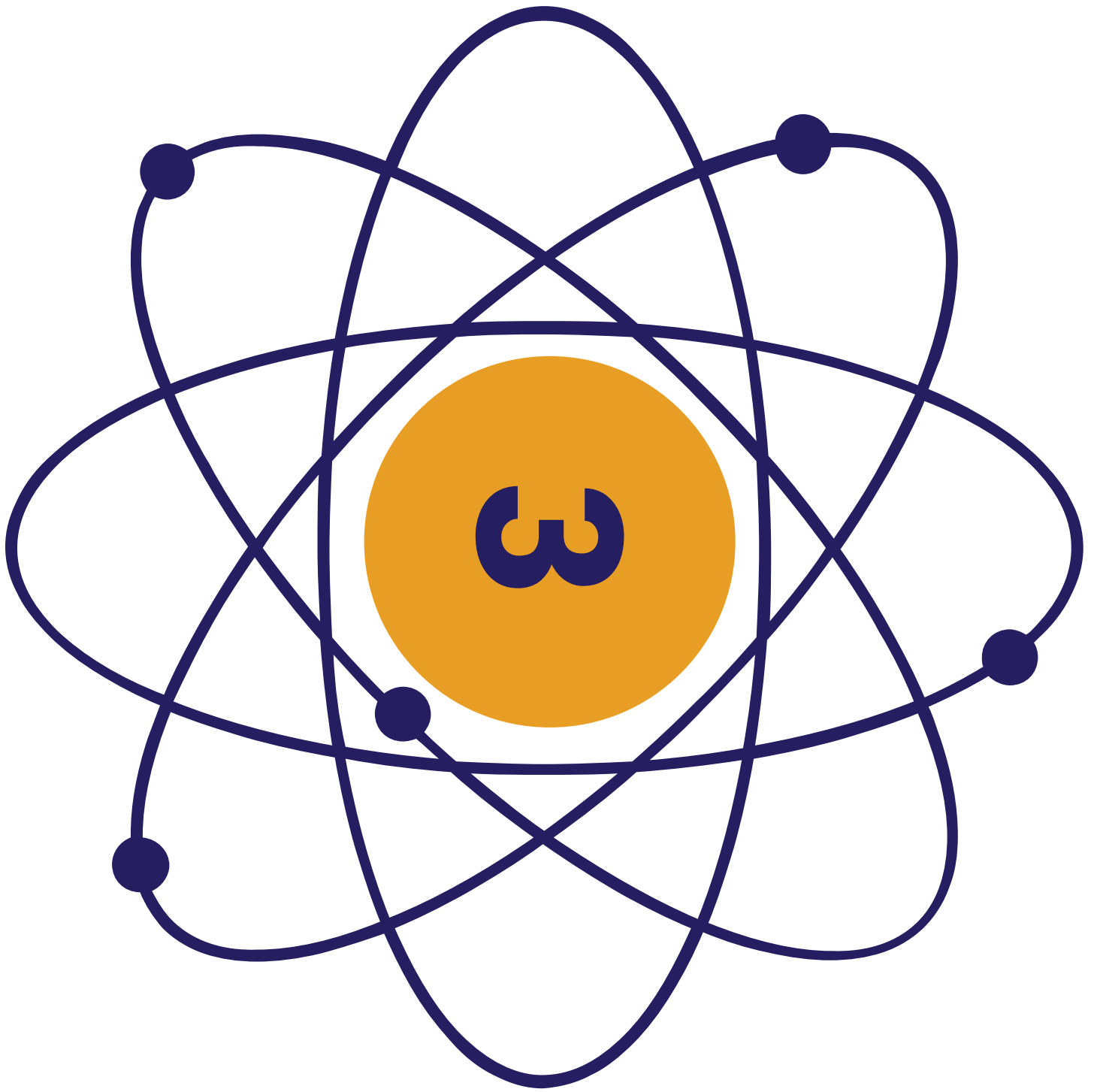
describes a liquid that is thin and flows easily

Vapour

a vapour is made of tiny drops of liquid floating in the air

Wheel

a round object that spins on an axle, like the wheels of a car



Clay

clay is wet and sticky dirt that can be used to make things like bowls and mugs because it becomes hard when it dries

Compress

compress means to squish an object to make it smaller

Distance

the distance that something has travelled is the space it has moved from the beginning of its journey to the end

Earth Materials

natural materials found on the earth including minerals, rocks, soil and water

Flower

the flower of a plant is the part that usually grows at the top of the stem, is a different colour and grows the fruit

Germination

the process by which a seed begins to grow and develop into a plant

Leaf

a leaf is a thin and flat part of the plant that grows from the stem and is usually green

Load

a load is the weight that something is carrying or holding, like the load of a truck

GRADE 3

Loam

a type of soil that is the best for plants to grow in

Pebbles

pebbles are tiny, smooth and round rocks

Pistil

the female reproductive part of a flower that takes in pollen

Root

the root of a plant is the part that grows underground, holds the plant in place and collects water and nutrients

Sand

sand is a type of dirt found at the beaches and is made up of tiny pieces of rocks

Soil

soil is the type of dirt in which plants grow

Speed

speed describes how fast or slow something is moving

Stability

the stability of an object describes how sturdy it is and how well it can resist falling over

Stamen

the male reproductive part of a flower that produces pollen

Stem

the stem of a plant is the stock from which the leaves and flowers grow off of

Strength

the strength of an object describes how difficult it is to break it

Strut

a part of a structure, like a bridge or a building, that provides support and resists compression

Tension

when there is tension on an object, such as an elastic, that object is stretched so that it is tight

Ties

ties are parts of a structure that secure pieces of the structure together

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