The adjective **obtuse** is good for describing someone slow on the uptake: "Don't be so obtuse: get with the program!"

The adjective *obtuse* literally means "rounded" or "blunt," but when it's used for a person, it means "not quick or alert in perception" — in other words, not the sharpest tool in the shed. It's not just for dull people, but also dull angles: in geometry, an obtuse angle is one that is not so sharp (between 90 and 180 degrees).

**DEFINITIONS AND USAGE EXAMPLES**

- of an angle; between 90 and 180 degrees
- lacking in insight or discernment; slow to learn or understand; lacking intellectual acuity
  - "too obtuse to grasp the implications of his behavior"
  - "he was either normally stupid or being deliberately obtuse"
- (of a leaf shape) rounded at the apex
- Synonyms: purblind, undiscerning; dense, dim, dull, dumb, slow, stupid

Directions: Discuss the meaning of the word with your students, with special emphasis on any variations or nuances of the word specific to your discipline. Consider taking it a step further by using one or all of the following ideas as you involve students with the new vocabulary. Remember to preview all content you intend to share with students. Not all items on the lists provided below are appropriate for all classes or age levels.

**1 (Mathematics)**

“What’s the Deal with Euclid’s Fourth Postulate?”

By Evelyn Lamb | April 21, 2014


Definitions 11 and 12 are for **obtuse** and acute angles, which are defined as being greater than or less than a right angle, respectively.

*Scientific American  Apr 21, 2014*
2 (Music)

“The lead singer of Death Cab for Cutie is in the middle of a tour to promote his solo album "Former Lives" [sic]..."The way I write now is very different from how I wrote early on,' he notes. 'In the early days, my lyrics were more obtuse, partially out of intention, but partially from being 20 years old and wanting to be profound.'

Seattle Times Nov 7, 2012

Click here to link to the article:

Click here to listen to the music:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nw2y7panEi&list=PL_UdsOmUWi9z1bTKhC_gAA9gw7Hjha377

Click here to read the lyrics:
http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/benjamingibbard/dreamsong.html
http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/deathcabforcutie/bendtosquares.html

3 (Psychology/Social Science)

“What Do IQ Tests Test?: Interview with Psychologist W. Joel Schneider”

By Scott Barry Kaufman | February 3, 2014 in Scientific American

The fourth question in the interview is, “Can a person be highly intelligent and still score poorly on IQ tests? If so, in what ways is that situation possible?” Schneider’s answer:

“There are countless ways in which this can happen. Language and other cultural barriers cause intelligence tests to produce underestimates of intelligence. It is quite common to fail to get sustained optimal effort from young children and from people with a number of mental disorders. In these cases, all but the most obtuse clinicians will recognize that something is amiss and will take appropriate action (e.g., find a more appropriate test or discontinue testing until optimal effort is again possible). Unfortunately, a single obtuse clinician can do a lot of damage.”

Click on the graphic to link to the article.
“Why Bob Dylan Didn’t Ring the Chimes of Freedom over Ai Weiwei”

“Those who wanted pop’s once-political poet to condemn China’s treatment of Ai Weiwei haven’t been paying attention to his career . . .

“If you thought Dylan would ever take an obvious political line you haven’t been following him carefully enough. It’s understandable for human-rights campaigners to wish for public support from Dylan. It is obtuse, however, for them to suggest that he is somehow betraying his own values as a political songwriter by not protesting. Dylan betrayed those values, deliberately and gleefully, in the mid-1960s. He has never looked back.”

From: The Guardian, April 2011

“An Interview with the Designer Who Made the Most Awesome Book Cover of the Summer” from Slate.com Book Reviews

“Sometimes a title is really weak or obtuse and might carry less weight in the package.”

Slate Aug 6, 2014
"The Hoyle State: A Primordial Nucleus behind the Elements of Life"

"Using supercomputers and new mathematical techniques, physicists are working to reveal how the Hoyle state atomic nucleus gives rise to the light elements that enable life, and how it drives the evolution of stars."

"Like a bent arm, the Hoyle state takes the shape of an obtuse triangle with an alpha particle at each vertex."

Illustrations

> 90°
< 180°

Obtuse Angle
(Entertainment/General Interest/Seminar)

Have a student read this response from a participant in the Miss American pageant.

Discuss how her answer qualifies as obtuse.

YouTube: clip from *Shawshank Redemption*:

**The Shawshank Redemption: "Obtuse***

by SpeakWell Daily • 1 year ago • 887 views

(adjective): annoyingly insensitive or slow to understand.

Click on the respective pictures to view the original movie clip and the *Family Guy* spoof.