

Face to Face

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FACE TO FACE

Synonyms of the same semantic field share an overall element of meaning. For example, "face guard", "birdcage", "facemask", "face mask", "mask", and "face shield", when employed in a sports context, all refer generally to a protective facial covering worn by an individual participating in sports. However, a close study of these terms will demonstrate that their specific meanings are quite different. A fencer would be in a sorry predicament were he to find himself with a "birdcage" instead of a "face guard". This suggests then, that the discrepancies among these terminology units are not only of a semantic nature, but also result from their various usages.

For purposes of analysis, the above-mentioned family of synonyms will be listed with their definitions, the elements of which will be subsequently broken down in table form.

"*Face Guard* — a guard for the face; usu: a complete or partial mask (as worn by... football players or fencers)"¹.

"*Face Guard* ...has... lessened the number of facial injuries... Choice... (depends) upon the position played... Face guards with vertical bars added... have the disadvantage of restricting the player's vision..."².

"*Birdcage* — ...offers protection for the eyes, nose, and mouth... (Birdcages) vary in styles and the amount of protection they provide. Linemen usually prefer the "birdcage" in which three bars run horizontally... connected by a centered vertical bar"³.

"*Facemask* — It offers protection for the eyes, nose, and mouth... Facemasks (are) made of either metal or hard plastic... Defensive backs and wide receivers... prefer fewer bars (as they) need total visibility..."⁴.

"*Face Mask* — Jacques Plante... NHL goalie designed this... face mask. It gives... coverage for player's face and ears. Mask is made of epoxy resin and fibre glass..."⁵.

"*Mask* — used... for protection when fencing...⁶. Masks with plastic or canvas trim... There are... masks that have a heavier mesh and afford more protection to the top and back of the head⁷. The wire helmet... worn on the head"⁸.

"*Face Shield* — visor and flip-up shield for snowmobile helmets. Removable shield. Clear, amber, blue, or smoke color. White plastic visor... Curved face shield for certified helmets"⁹.

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1. *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1966), New York, World Publishing Company, p. 812.
 2. A. L. Lenard (1976): *Canadian Football Instructor*, Ontario, Queen's University, p. 376.
 3. Mike Conklin, *Inside Football* (1978), Chicago, Contemporary Books Inc., p. 90.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. *Eaton's Fall and Winter 1973*, Toronto, Eaton's, 1973, p. 489.
 6. C. L. DeBeaumont, *All About Fencing* (1978), Toronto, Coles Publishing Co. Ltd., p. 9.
 7. Muriel Bower, *Foil Fencing* (1980), 4th ed. USA, Wm. C. Brown Co. Publishers, p. 11.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 9. *Canadian Tire Fall and Winter 1977-78*, Toronto, Canadian Tire Corporation Ltd., 1977, p. 14.

Table

Terms	Nature	Constituents	Function	Object Protected	Context
face guard	-guard -mask	-bars	-guard, lessen facial injuries	-face	-football -fencing
birdcage	-mask	-three horizontal bars -one vertical bar	-protection	-face (eyes nose, and mouth)	-football
facemask	-mask	-metal -hard plastic -bars	-protection	-face (eyes nose, and mouth)	-football
face mask	-mask	-epoxy resin -fibre glass	-coverage	-face and ears	-hockey
mask	-mask -helmet	-plastic -canvas -mesh -wire	-protection	-head	-fencing
face shield	-shield -visor	-plastic	-shield	-face	-snowmobile

The information given in the Table indicates that while the nature, function, and object protected are similar, there are still many differences in the usage of these terminology units. It is interesting to note that all of the terms, with the exception of "birdcage", indicate in themselves their nature. "Birdcage" does not reflect its nature because the unit has acquired its meaning through analogy of form with "a cage made of wires... for confining birds"¹⁰, and as such, is a borrowing from another field. Moreover, this points to a difference in level of language. "Birdcage" is primarily jargon used within the field, therefore its usage is more restricted than that of the other terms.

Whether the unit is modified or unmodified gives rise to further differences. "Face guard" includes the adjective to distinguish this piece of equipment from other similar equipment for specifically the mouth and chin. The modification of "facemask", "face mask", and "face shield" also serves to indicate the object protected, thus narrowing down the usage of these terms by distinguishing them from other types of protective equipment such as, a gas mask, or a windshield. Moreover, qualification of these substantives also suggests that they are used in a concrete rather than a figurative sense, which again restricts their usage. The only unmodified term, "mask" remains fully polysemic, and must totally rely on context for its specific meaning. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that "facemask" and "face mask" are variations of one form. Both attributive and qualified nouns are perfectly acceptable in English, yet the existence of two forms seems somewhat redundant.

10. *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1969), New York, World Publishing Company, p. 186.

Differentiation of these synonyms is also possible as a result of discrepancies in their destinations and in their constituents. "Birdcage" is specific in that it refers to a particular kind of face guard used by specific players in football. It is to some extent synonymous with "face guard", and "facemask" or "face mask" when employed in a football context. However, the correspondence is only partial as "birdcage" is specific while the latter three terms are generic in that they are also used in other sports, and their constituents vary depending on the sport. "Facemask" or "face mask", and "mask" are generic, however the use of the latter term is more restrictive because of its lack of qualification, and is less frequently employed. "Face guard" and "mask" agree when employed in fencing, nonetheless the former is modified while the latter unmodified. "Face guard" and "facemask" or "face mask" correspond when used in football, are both generic, are more frequently used than "birdcage", and seem to be used interchangeably in football. In this context, they may be referred to as "coinciding" synonyms. However, they are only partially synonymous as they refer to different objects when employed in different sports. "Face shield" does not concur with the other synonyms as its constituents and context are completely different from those of the other terms.

The results of this brief study may be synthesized as follows:

Terms	Synonyms
face guard ^{G,C}	facemask/ face mask ^{G,C} birdcage ^{S,J}
mask ^G	face guard ^{G,C}
face shield	—

G = generic, S = specific, J = jargon, C = commonly used.

Other differentiating factors, such as regional application, do not come into play primarily because football, hockey, and snowmobiling are largely North American sports. Nonetheless, it can be concluded that there are a sufficient number of differences in meaning and in usage with respect to levels of language, forms of the terminology units, destination, coincidence, and frequency, to distinguish among this family of synonyms with some certainty.

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