In the smallest number of features that you can imagine, please create a set of binary contrasts for distinguishing these items. Bring your solution to class on February 26.

Consider, though, the way you would regard these two items if you were using them to devise a signaling system in which there were only two signals: one, a college diploma; the other, *Sense and Sensibility*. (Think of a traffic light, though instead of the green light to indicate “Go,” a college diploma would appear; instead of the red light to indicate “Stop,” a copy of *Sense and Sensibility*. How do you tell them apart? What is the best way?

When linguists describe a language, they review the distinctive contrasts, often employing binary distinctive attributes (simple either-or feature comparisons) to describe a system of contrasts. The largest number of contrasts which you can make from a binary features set is 2^n, where n is the number of binary features. A traffic light, for example, has either red or green. When there were only two signals, you could distinguish five contrasts between the two: go, stop, and three levels of cautionary signals. But in the real world of language, you could distinguish infinitely many contrasts, and therefore infinitely many binary features. The trick is to choose your features carefully.

Consider these two items: a college diploma and the novel *Sense and Sensibility*. How do you tell them apart? What is the best way?
a college diploma

+ a copy of *Sense and Sensibility*

+ a copy of *Sense and Sensibility* with a few pages missing

+ a jar of taco sauce

+ a linzer tart

+ a moustache drawn on the Mona Lisa using a felt-tip marker

+ a pearl

+ a takeout menu from Ollie's

+ a spoon

Lucy Vincent beach on Martha's Vineyard

Fort Knox

Tom Cruise

+ the Nexus

+ a yoga mat

+ the mechanical shark from the movie *Jaws*

+ the second exam from *Perception, Fall, 2007*

+ the Temple of Dendur