

Larbi Ben M'hidi University- Oum El Bouaghi

Department of English

Course Title: READING

Level: First Year-LMD

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## CONTEXT CLUES

**Objective:** The students will be able to use context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.

### 1. Definition

Context clues are hints found within a sentence, paragraph, or passage that a reader can use to understand the meanings of new or unfamiliar words.

Learning the meaning of a word through its use in a sentence or paragraph is the most practical way to build vocabulary, since a dictionary is not always available when a reader encounters an unknown word.

A reader must be aware that many words have several possible meanings. Only by being sensitive to the circumstances in which a word is used can the reader decide upon an appropriate definition to fit the context.

### 2. Types of Context Clues

Type	Description	Example
Definition	The author provides a direct (explicit) definition of an unknown word in the sentence.	<u>The arbitrator</u> , the neutral person chosen to settle the dispute, arrived at her decision.
Synonym/ Restatement	The author uses a word having the same or nearly the same meaning as another word or	Flooded with spotlights – the focus of all attention – the new Miss America began her

	other words in a sentence.	year-long reign. She was <u>the cynosure</u> of all eyes for the rest of the evening.
Antonym or Contrast	The author uses another word or phrase that means the opposite of an unfamiliar word.	While Luis is hardworking, his <u>indolent</u> brother spends most of the time watching TV or sitting around with friends.
Comparison	In comparison clues, the author uses words and phrases that have the same or similar meaning as an unfamiliar word.	My brother is <u>enthralled</u> by birds similar to the way that I am fascinated by insects.
Example/ Explanation	The author provides examples or additional explanations or summaries to help you understand an unfamiliar word. The word is cleared up by giving an example.	<u>Piscatorial</u> creatures, such as flounder, salmon, and trout, live in the coldest parts of the ocean.
Cause and Effect	The meaning of an unknown word depends on the cause/effect relationship with other words in the text.	Since no one came to the first meeting, attendance for the second one is <u>mandatory</u> for all staff.
List/ Series	The unfamiliar word is included in a series of related words that give an idea of the word's meaning.	North American <u>predators</u> include grizzly bears, pumas, wolves, and foxes.

**Practice:** *Each example below has hints within the passage or sentence to help you figure out the meaning of the word. Read each question CAREFULLY and circle the correct answer.*

1. No matter where you go, the Internet is following you. Almost every portable device is being made with an Internet connection. Most new TVs and many other appliances come with Internet connections as well. The Internet is truly ubiquitous.

If something is ubiquitous,

- A. it is fuzzy and will bite you
- B. it is everywhere
- C. it costs too much money
- D. it causes rashes

2. Speaking rudely to the judges was rash behavior. You really hurt your chances of winning!

In the above context, what does “rash” mean?

- A. an itchy skin condition
- B. funny
- C. trying to hide or disguise a piece of cheese
- D. with little thought or consideration

3. Some people are always bashing the president just like others bashed the one before him. Wouldn't you think that everyone could find something to praise him for, at least once in a while?

What does “bashing” mean in the above selection?

- A. hitting hard with a heavy tool
- B. going to too many expensive parties
- C. speaking or writing harshly about

D. voting for a different candidate

4. Wherever he goes, the esteemed Dr. Sanchez is applauded for his life saving research.

What does “esteemed” mean?

A. held over boiling water

B. very old

C. unable to chew gum

D. greatly admired

5. I believe that if you lower taxes so that people can keep more of the money they earn, it will be an incentive for them to work harder.

What is the meaning of “incentive”?

A. a reason to do something

B. a small amount of money

C. tax

D. a good job

6. Most of America's Founding Fathers did not believe in women's suffrage. Only men could vote in the United States until 1920.

What is “suffrage”?

A. something that causes physical pain

B. an early flag

C. skirts that did not cover ankles

D. the right to vote

7. Some people are sure that the new health care law will mean better care for everyone. Others argue that the law will mean less care and longer waiting lines for those who need to see doctors. It's a controversy that will not go away soon.

A controversy is something that people

A. have strong disagreements over

- B. blow their noses into
- C. need to pay for a visit to a doctor
- D. eat with sweet candy

**8.** Removing seeds from cotton plants was a slow job until Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin.

What is a cotton gin?

- A. a drink
- B. a book
- C. a machine
- D. a cloth

**9.** In the early 1600s, a dangerous trip across the Atlantic Ocean was a daunting idea. The Europeans, who would someday be known as the Pilgrims, must have been a very determined and brave group of settlers.

A daunting task is one that would \_\_\_\_\_ someone.

- A. tickle
- B. amuse
- C. lose or misplace
- D. frighten or intimidate

**10.** The original Pilgrims called themselves the “Saints” and referred to others who joined with them for the voyage as the “Strangers.”

In this context, “original” means

- A. one of a kind
- B. first
- C. humorous
- D. musical

**11.** The Saints and Strangers argued about how they would live in the New World. After much discussion, they came together and signed the Mayflower Compact.

The Compact was

- A. a container for makeup
- B. a small item
- C. a machine used for mashing corn
- D. an agreement

**12.** When the Pilgrims landed in what is now Massachusetts, they were fearful that the Native Americans would attack them. However, the people that they encountered, the Wampanoag Indians, were a peaceful and generous tribe.

To encounter, is to

- A. meet
- B. note how many
- C. fight
- D. exchange text messages

**13.** As the summer sun sent scattered rays through the maple and oak leaves overhead, the young deer stood frozen, making it almost impossible for the hikers to see her.

In the above passage, the word “frozen” means

- A. very cold
- B. visible
- C. not moving
- D. not melted

**14.** Christmas is a time when Dad reverts to his childhood. I really think he looks forward to Santa’s visit more than any other member of the family. Mom says that he’ll always be a child during this season.

What does “reverts” mean in the above passage?

- A. stands up straight
- B. peeks at presents
- C. drinks too much egg nog
- D. goes back to being what he was

**15.** Fortunately, the explosion diverted the asteroid from a course that would have sent it hurdling into our planet.

To divert is to

- A. change the direction of
- B. look for really high waves
- C. jump into a dry river
- D. look through a telescope

**16.** A wonderful 98 year old woman is working day and night to knit scarves to send as gifts for the troops. What a selfless person she is!

A selfless woman

- A. is selfish
- B. has no name
- C. likes to wear scarves
- D. cares more about others than herself

**17.** The United States has a vast amount of newly discovered clean geothermal (natural heat from the Earth’s crust) energy. Tapping into this energy source could provide at least 10 times the energy that can be obtained from the nation’s known coal reserves.

What does “vast” mean?

- A. a large amount
- B. not enough

C. dangerous

D. having no known use

**18.** Which word in the above paragraph means supplies that are available to be used?

A. geothermal

B. tapping

C. continent

D. reserves

**19.** Using IQ tests and MRI brain scans, researchers have found that the measurable intelligence of teenagers can rise and fall over time. We used to believe that intelligence was static. But now, because of new studies, we know that teens and even fully mature adults can grow more brain cells when needed.

What does “static” mean in the above selection?

A. noise

B. not changing

C. moldy

D. unreal

**20.** It’s a wonder to me how anyone can still be undecided about this election. These two candidates are certainly distinct. Each would lead our nation in opposite directions.

What does “distinct” mean?

A. needing a bath

B. dishonest

C. clearly different

D. about the same age



**21.** Poor Farmer Chevez labors sixteen hours a day and never has time for a vacation. He deserves better! Everyone should have at least one day a week for rest and relaxation.

What does labor mean?

- A. plays
- B. eats
- C. works
- D. unions

**22.** It's not that I'm unfriendly, but sometimes I want to leave society behind and be alone for a while.

What does society mean?

- A. people living as members of a group
- B. homes with messy floors
- C. the fastest runners
- D. people who are afraid of Girl Scouts

**23.** Our new alarm system will wake up the entire neighborhood if an intruder gets in the house. An intruder is someone who intrudes.

To intrude is to

- A. paint or repair old buildings
- B. wear ones shoes on the wrong feet
- C. go where one is not wanted or doesn't belong
- D. be very noisy

**24.** Those scientists want to hear what our professor thinks about their theory because he is the foremost expert in their field.

What does foremost mean?

- A. The first or main one
- B. craziest

C. least informed

D. loudest

**25.** Your cousin claimed to be late because the doors of his house were frozen shut. Even though I have my doubts, his explanation is plausible. It got really cold last night. I'll just have to take his word for it.

If a statement is plausible,

A. you must always believe it

B. you should never believe it

C. it's hard to understand because it makes no sense

D. it's believable enough to possibly be true

**26.** If you don't curtail your spending, you'll be broke in no time at all!

Which word is a synonym of "curtail"?

A. reduce

B. follow

C. behind

D. buy

**27.** No word must ever leak out about this military action! It has to be a clandestine operation in order to succeed.

Which word is a synonym of "clandestine"?

A. family

B. useful

C. dangerous

D. secret

**28.** Put this medicine on your arm and rub it into your skin until it's invisible. It will inhibit the infection's attempt to spread.

What does "inhibit" mean?

A. live in a certain place

- B. block or slow down
- C. itch or burn
- D. help to do something important

**29.** Fortunately, the dizzy spell was transient. He was able to continue playing within seconds and had no trouble winning the match.

When you describe an event as “transient,” you are saying that

- A. it sounds like a train
- B. it is quite harmful
- C. it helps you win
- D. it doesn't last long

**30.** Brea and Elizabeth are having a dispute over which radio station to play at work. It would be so much simpler if they both liked the same kind of music.

A dispute is a

- A. musical instrument
- B. choice of music
- C. discovery
- D. disagreement

**Reference:**

Mikulecky, B.S. & Jeffries, L (1986). Reading power : Reading faster, thinking skills, reading for pleasure, comprehension skills. USA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.