

GUESSING MEANING FROM CONTEXT CLUES

- The ability to infer the meaning of an unknown word by looking at the vocabulary around it or its context is an important reading skill.
- The context here refers to the sentence or paragraph where the unfamiliar word appears, which provides the reader with information to make sense of the term.
- Context clues are words or phrases in the sentence or paragraph that help the reader to figure out the meaning of the unknown word.
- 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.
- There are 4 main types of clues you could use to support your reading comprehension.
 1. Synonyms and definitions
 2. Examples
 3. Antonyms and contrast
 4. General Knowledge

1. SYNONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

A synonym is a word or phrase that means the same or is very similar to another word. Definitions state or describe the meaning of a word. These two context clues can be used to discover the meaning of an unknown word.

- His emaciation, that is, his skeleton-like appearance, was frightening to see. “Skeleton-like appearance” is the definition of “emaciation.”
- Days after he made a **flippant** remark in class, he regretted sounding so **disrespectful**.
- The primary dietary source of sodium is **sodium chloride**, also known as **table salt**, he says.
- **Talent** can take years to surface. When Robert was a young boy, his great **aptitude** in physics was not all apparent to his teachers.
- The mountain pass was a **tortuous** road, **winding and twisting** like a snake around the trees of the mountainside. “Tortuous” means “winding and twisting.”

2. EXAMPLES

Examples can inform the reader about unknown words. They can illustrate the meaning of the word that they refer to.

Signals of examples in the text: for example, (e.g), for instance, such as, including, like, as an example, cases of, instances of, type of,

- The **Lehigh malware** is an example of a **computer virus**.
- Networks allow users to share **high-tech gadgets** such as **ipads, tablets, etc.**
- Since she retired from her job, she has developed new **avocations**. For example, she enjoys **internet , going to the cinema and gardening**.
- **Piscatorial creatures**, such as **flounder, salmon, and trout**, live in the coldest parts of the ocean. “Piscatorial” obviously refers to fish.
- **Celestial bodies**, including the **sun, moon, and stars**, have fascinated man through the centuries. “Celestial” objects are those in the sky or heavens.

3. ANTONYMS AND CONTRAST

Antonyms are words that mean the opposite of other words. Antonyms can refer to the opposed idea of an unknown word in the sentence or paragraph.

Signals of antonyms in the text: however, but, yet, in contrast, although, on the other hand, despite, while, in spite of, even though, unlike, nevertheless.

- The glass might absorb so much acoustic energy that it will **shatter**; the other glasses remain **unaffected**.
- To keep healthy, people need to be **active**. If they remain **stagnant**, it could result in loss of vitality and health.
- When the light brightens, the pupils of the eyes **contract**; however, when it grows darker, they **dilate**. “Dilate” means the opposite of “contract.”
- The children were as different as day and night. He was a **lively conversationalist**, but she was reserved and taciturn. “**Taciturn**” means the opposite of a “lively conversationalist.”
- It kept me **dry and warm** even though I was **soaked**, and all of the moisture on my body passed right through.

4. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

Sometimes it is necessary to rely on your own experience and background knowledge to figure out the meaning of a word. Read all the words surrounding the unknown term to help you draw conclusions based on the complimentary information found in the text.

Sometimes a reader knows from experience how people or things act in a given situation. This knowledge provides the clue to a word's meaning.

- ...physicians usually allow football players to resume play once symptoms **abate**, perhaps within days.
- For the sailors, the wind continued to **abate** and you could feel their frustration.
- During those first bewildering weeks, the thoughts of a college freshman drift back to high school where he was “in,” knew everyone, and felt at home. A feeling of **nostalgia** sweeps over him.
- She walked away from her closet and quickly slipped a **jersey** over her head. She smoothed it into place over her hips, added a belt, glanced at the mirror, and left for work.

Beyond the immediate context of the sentence, you can also find clues to the meaning of an unknown word in the larger context of a whole **paragraph**.

Read the following paragraphs and answer the questions about the underlined nonsense word.

As the harmful effects of **mropping** on health have become widely known, many cities and some countries have passed laws that limit where it is allowed. In many places, **mropping** is no longer permitted in restaurants and bars. Owners of restaurants and bars were against the laws because they believed that their businesses would suffer, but that happened only in the first few months. After that, business returned to normal. The laws have also had another positive effect, apart from making the air cleaner for everyone: More people have given up **mropping** altogether.

1. What part of speech is it? *noun*
2. What words are found around it? *effects of mropping, mropping is no longer permitted, more people have given up mropping*
3. What word or phrase could replace it? *smoking*

In many countries, there are electronic signs along roads that **zop** drivers about dangers or problems ahead. These may be short-term dangers, such as an accident or bad weather, or longer-term problems, such as roadwork. Studies have shown, however, that drivers do not always notice these signs. To be sure that drivers are **zopped** about the condition of the road, the highway management service in Scotland has developed a new electronic system that sends messages directly to special electronic systems built into the cars. Do these systems work better to **zop** drivers than the roadside signs? It is too soon to tell. The results of the first studies will be published next year.

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