

How to Use Context Clues to Define Words

0:00	Owl: Welcome to How to Use Context Clues to Define Words, an instructional video on reading comprehension brought to you by the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab.
0:19	Unfamiliar words can pose a serious problem for reading comprehension.
0:24	Therefore, in order to improve your ability to understand what you read, you will need to expand your vocabulary.
0:30	There are a couple of things you can do when you encounter a word you don't understand.
0:34	You can look it up!
0:36	Sometimes a text will provide definitions for key words, either in the text or in a sidebar or glossary.
0:43	Otherwise, you can look up unfamiliar words in a paper or electronic dictionary.
0:49	Another thing you can do is look for clues in the word or text that can help you decipher its meaning.
0:55	There are two types of clues you can look for: context clues and word-part clues.
1:01	In this video, I'll explain how to look for and use context clues to decipher the meaning of unfamiliar words.
1:07	This will help you grow your vocabulary and improve your reading comprehension.
1:11	I'll discuss word-part clues in another video.
1:16	What is a context clue?
1:18	A context clue is a word or phrase in the same sentence or a nearby sentence that can help the reader decipher the meaning of an unfamiliar word.
1:27	There are different kinds of context clues.
1:29	I'll discuss each type and give some tips for how to identify them.
1:33	I'll also share an example in which the unfamiliar word is in bold and the clue is in italics.
1:40	Let's get started!
1:42	The first type is called a Definition Clue.
1:45	A definition clue is a word or phrase that defines the unfamiliar word.
1:50	Look for words or phrases that introduce a definition for the unfamiliar word, such as <i>is defined as</i> , <i>means</i> , and <i>refers to</i> .
2:00	Also, look for punctuation marks that set off a definition, such as quotation marks, parentheses, and brackets.
2:08	Here's an example:

2:09	Telepathy is defined as the ability to communicate information to another person without the use of any known senses or communication devices.
2:18	In this sentence the phrase “is defined as” is a definition clue that introduces a definition for the word “telepathy.”
2:26	The second type is called a Synonym Clue.
2:29	A synonym clue is a word or phrase that has a similar meaning to the unfamiliar word.
2:34	Look for words or phrases that introduce a synonym, such as in other words, or, that is to say, and also known as.
2:44	Also, look for punctuation marks that set off a synonym, such as commas, parentheses, dashes, and brackets.
2:52	Here’s an example:
2:54	The cheerleader appeared vapid — <i>spiritless</i> —as he delivered his pitiful performance in front of the stands.
3:01	In this sentence the dashes around the word “spiritless” suggest that it is a synonym for the word “vapid.”
3:08	The third type is called a Contrast Clue.
3:12	A contrast clue is a word or phrase that has the opposite meaning of the unfamiliar word.
3:17	In other words, it’s an antonym.
3:20	Look for words or phrases that introduce a contrast, such as however, but, instead of, on the other hand, on the contrary, whereas, in contrast, unlike, although, and even though.
3:37	Here’s an example:
3:39	Lions are solitary creatures that prefer to hunt alone, <i>but</i> hyenas are gregarious creatures that hunt in packs.
3:46	In this sentence the word “but” is a contrast clue that suggests hyenas are different from lions.
3:52	If lions are solitary and hyenas are gregarious, then you can guess that the meaning of the word “gregarious” is the opposite of solitary.
4:00	A working definition might be “tending to group together.”
4:04	The fourth type is called an Example Clue.
4:07	An example clue is a word or phrase that provides an example to illustrate the unfamiliar word.
4:13	Look for words or phrases that introduce examples, such as for example, for instance, to illustrate, like, and such as.
4:24	Here’s an example:
4:26	The manager disliked obsequious behavior, <i>such as</i> fawning and kowtowing.
4:31	In this sentence the phrase “such as” is an example clue that suggests the words “fawning” and “kowtowing” describe “obsequious.”
4:40	The fifth type is called an Experience Clue.

4:43	An experience clue draws upon personal experience or background knowledge to help you infer the meaning of the unfamiliar word.
4:51	Look for a word, phrase, or sentence that includes a familiar experience or information you already know.
4:58	Here's an example:
4:59	Television audiences are familiar with disingenuous ads that make <i>grand promises</i> .
5:05	In this sentence, you can interpret the word "disingenuous" by drawing upon your experience as a television viewer.
5:11	If disingenuous ads make grand promises, then "disingenuous" must mean something like "insincere" or "false."
5:19	Finally, the sixth type is called an Adjacent Clue.
5:23	An adjacent clue is a word or phrase in a nearby sentence that explains the meaning of the unfamiliar word.
5:29	Here's an example:
5:30	Nanotechnology is becoming more widespread in society. <i>As computer chips continue to shrink</i> , manufacturers are placing them in everything from clothing, to building materials, to even the human body.
5:42	In this sentence you can guess that the phrase "computer chips continue to shrink" in the second sentence refers to the word "nanotechnology" in the first sentence.
5:51	Therefore, "nanotechnology" has to do with technology that is very small in size.
5:58	With one or more of these clues, you should be able to deduce the meaning of many unfamiliar words as you read.
6:04	And be sure to check your definition with a dictionary afterward to make sure your deduction is correct.
6:12	Thanks for listening to this instructional video on How to Use Context Clues to Define Words!
6:18	Visit the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab for more support with reading and writing skills.