How to Use Word-Part Clues to Define Words

0:00  **Owl:** Welcome to How to Use Word-Part Clues to Define Words, an instructional video on reading comprehension brought to you by the Excelsior College Online Writing Lab.

0:12  Unfamiliar words can pose a serious problem for reading comprehension.

0:16  Therefore, in order to improve your ability to understand what you read, you will need to expand your vocabulary.

0:22  There are a couple of things you can do when you encounter a word you don’t understand.

0:27  You can look it up!

0:29  Sometimes a text will provide definitions for key words, either in the text or in a sidebar or glossary.

0:35  Otherwise, you can look up unfamiliar words in a paper or electronic dictionary.

0:40  Another thing you can do is look for clues in the word or text that can help you decipher its meaning.

0:46  There are two types of clues you can look for: context clues and word-part clues.

0:52  In this video, I’ll explain how to look for and use word-part clues to decipher the meaning of unfamiliar words.

0:59  This will help you grow your vocabulary and improve your reading comprehension.

1:04  I’ll discuss context clues in another video.

1:08  Word parts are the building blocks that form words.

1:11  If you understand how to identify and make sense of word parts, you can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words while you read.

1:18  There are three different word parts: the Root, the Prefix, and the Suffix.

1:25  The Root is the base word that has its own meaning.

1:28  The Prefix is attached to the beginning of the root and modifies its meaning.

1:33  The Suffix is attached to the end of the root and also modifies its meaning.

1:38  Let’s look at an example.

1:40  Here’s the word “autobiography.”

1:43  If we take it apart into its word parts we have: auto | bio | graphy.

1:50  The root word is “bio,” which means “life.”

1:54  The prefix is “auto,” which means “oneself.”

1:57  The suffix is “graphy,” which means “writing.”

2:01  We can translate the literal meaning into this working definition: “self-writing about one’s life.”

2:08  Now, try out your definition in the original sentence.
Replace the original word with your working definition and see if the sentence makes sense:

In his “self-writing about his life,” Frederick Douglass describes his escape from slavery and transformation into a prominent abolitionist.

It’s a good idea to check your working definition against the actual definition of the word in a dictionary.

In this case, the dictionary tells us that the word autobiography means “a history of a person’s life written or told by that person.”

That’s pretty much the working definition that we discovered using word parts!

You can improve your ability to identify and interpret word parts by becoming familiar with the most common word parts.

Use your search engine to find free lists of the most common word parts and their definitions online.

Thanks for listening to this instructional video on How to Use Word-Part Clues to Define Words!

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