

Vocabulary in Context - Tutor Hints

Context Clues are hints from words that surround an unknown word. Use the surrounding text to help define any word you don't know. The author's meaning of the word may be different from what you expect, and the surrounding context reveals that to you.

In many cases, you can determine the meaning of a word by noticing two ideas between which the author is showing a relationship. One idea contains the unknown word, and the other contains an idea that may relate to the word in one way or another.

Here are **four** sentences that show four types of relationships between ideas that help you see the meaning of an unknown word. Two parts of the sentence are underlined for you. The relationship between those two parts can help you identify the meaning of the italicized word:

1. **Example/Description** - These clues explain, describe, clarify or give an actual example of the unknown word. Some words that may signal an example or description are *for example, for instance, including, meaning, such as...*

Example: When I *procrastinate* by putting off working on a project until just before it is due, it is usually not my best work. (Procrastinate = putting off)

3. **Antonyms/Contrast** - An Antonym is a word with an opposite meaning. Sometimes there is one word (or phrase) in the sentence that means the **opposite** of the unknown word. Some words that may signal an antonym/contrast are *yet, but, however, on the other hand, in contrast...*

Example: Instead of Kathryn being *demoted* as she had feared, she was moved up to a new and more challenging job that paid more. ("Moved up" is the opposite of "demoted")

2. **Synonyms/Comparison** - A synonym is a word with a similar or identical meaning. There is sometimes one word (or phrase) in the sentence that means the **same** or **almost the same** as the unknown word. Words that sometimes signal a synonym are comparison transitions: *similar, just as, equally, the same as, like...*

Example: Her *predicament* presented her with the same difficult situation she had faced the year before, when her family moved for the first time. (A predicament is similar to a difficult situation)

4. **General Sense (General Knowledge)** - With these types of context clues, you'll need to draw conclusions based on the information given and perhaps some personal experience or insight.

Example: If you've ever gone on a blind date, you've probably experienced that moment of *trepidation* just before you meet your date for the first time. (In this case *trepidation* might mean nervousness, fright, anxiety, etc. In this example you can only determine the meaning by using your knowledge or experience about blind dates.)

Some more helpful tips:

- * If you think you have a correct answer, put it into the sentence (in place of the unknown word) to see if it fits.
- ** Look for punctuation and word parts that signal context clues.