

Vocabulary in Context: explanation and practice

There are a variety of strategies for learning the meaning of a word based on its context.

Clue one: The word is defined within the text. This can be done after punctuation such as a colon, comma, parentheses, or hyphens.

Example: The emu, a large flightless bird from Australia, can run very fast.
An emu is defined in the text as a large flightless bird from Australia.

The capybara – the world’s largest rodent- is a gentle animal.
What is a capybara?

Entrepreneurs (people who start their own businesses) are an important part of the economy.
What are entrepreneurs?

Clue two: The word is part of a list.

Examples: Hummingbirds, crows, pigeons, and orioles can all be found in your back yard.
What are orioles?

Jane loves jazz, classical, punk, and rockabilly.
What is rockabilly?

Clue three: It is the name of a category.

Examples: Jelly, butter, mustard, and ketchup are the most common condiments in an American refrigerator.
What are condiments?

Rats, mice, and squirrels are all common rodents.
What is a rodent?

Directions: Find the meanings of the words in bold:

1. **Bryce**, a national park in Utah, is a beautiful place to go hiking.

Bryce: _____ clue: _____

2. Carrots, broccoli, **kale**, and tomatoes are inexpensive and delicious vegetables.

kale: _____ clue: _____

3. **Felines**, such as lions, tigers, and house cats, are all skilled hunters.

felines: _____ clue: _____

4. A variety of **currencies** are used around the world, such as dollars, euros, and yen.

currencies: _____ clue: _____

5. **Blogs**, websites where people write their opinions, are growing in popularity.

blogs: _____ clue: _____

6. Deer, moose, bears, **elk**, and other large **game** are often hunted for sport in the US.

elk: _____ clue: _____

game: _____ clue: _____

Vocabulary in Context: explanation and practice - Part 2

Using context clues to determine the meaning of vocabulary words

Clue four: Comparison

Clue words: like, similar to, in common with

Examples: Like its cousin the elephant, the woolly mammoth was the largest land animal around when it was alive.

What is a woolly mammoth?

Similar to customers in a store, patients in a doctor's office expect quick service.

What are patients?

Clue five: Contrast

Clue words: however, unlike, in contrast to, different than, although, instead of, but

A sword is different from a knife because it is much larger and often sharper.

What is a sword?

Clue six: background knowledge

Example: Bears do not eat all winter while they are hibernating.

What is hibernating?

Clue seven: a similar word is used in the same sentence. In English, we don't like to repeat words, so we use two words with similar meanings rather than repeat the same word.

Example: I looked at my friend, then glanced at the clock.

What does glance mean?

Directions: Find the meanings of the words in bold:

1. Although I have lived in **urban** areas my whole life, I love spending time away from the city.

urban : _____ clue: _____

2. Unlike people who have many friends and feel like there is always someone who can help them, people with no friends feel **isolated**.

isolated: _____ clue: _____

3. A knife has two important parts: the **handle** and the **blade**. The blade is usually made of metal, and the handle is often made of wood.

Label the handle and the blade:



_____ clue: _____

_____ clue: _____

4. When people try to design flying cars, they expect them to take off and land like an airplane, but also to **hover** in the sky like a helicopter.

Hover: _____ clue: _____

5. I washed the dishes, cleaned the floor, and **sanitized** the bathroom.

sanitize: _____ clue: _____

6. We often think of farms as a place where new life is born, but they are also a place of killing because many animals on farms are **slaughtered** for food.

slaughter: _____ clue: _____

7. Americans use a large amount of gasoline every year. In fact, Americans **consumed** 133 billion gallons of gas in 2012.

consume: _____ clue: _____

Vocabulary in context practice

Read the following paragraphs. Define the words in bold based on their context.

There are a variety of approaches to learning a language. One approach is to study the **syntax** (grammar and sentence structure) of a language. This method involves studying sentence structure and verb tenses. For most people this style of studying is **dry**, but some people find it fascinating. A second method to learn a language is to read and listen to a lot of **material** in the foreign language, such as radio programs, TV shows, **podcasts**, movies, books, magazines, and websites. These are all useful tools for learning. In my opinion, a combination of both styles is the best way to learn.

Syntax =

Dry=

Material=

Podcasts=

Animals come in all different shapes and sizes, and live in all different environments, but they share the same needs. All animals need food, water, and **shelter** – a place to live. Some animals create their own shelter. For example, birds build **nests**. Beavers chew on trees until they fall down, then use those fallen **logs** to build dams. Other animals dig a hole in the ground to live in. This is common for many insects and **arachnids**, such as spiders and scorpions. It is also common for some **reptiles**, such as snakes and lizards. Some animals find caves to live in. Bears and foxes often build their **dens** inside caves or between large rocks to stay safe from the wind and rain. Fish also find safe places to live. Many species of fish stay close to rocks or coral reefs where they can hide from **predators** (animals that will eat them). Some animals carry their houses with them. Snails, clams, mussels, and other **mollusks** have shells to keep them safe.

shelter=

nests =

logs =

arachnids =

reptiles =

dens =

predators =

mollusks =

Find the meaning of words in context. Read the following sentences and answer the questions.

1. His shirt is red, orange, and burgundy. What is burgundy?

- a. a number
- b. a color
- c. a material

2. John was enthusiastic after his team won the soccer game. "It was such a great day!" he said.

Enthusiastic means:

- a. excited and happy
- b. calm
- d. sorry

3. Children often believe that mythical creatures, such as dragons, unicorns, and vampires, are real.

Mythical creatures are:

- a. imaginary animals
- b. real animals
- c. toys

4. I don't think she is fun. I think she is dull.

What does dull mean?

- a. funny
- b. boring

5. Chickens are not intelligent animals. In contrast, crows are very clever birds. Clever means:

- a. dumb
- b. smart

6. Moles live underground. Similarly, worms are subterranean animals.

Subterranean means:

- a. living above ground
- b. living underground
- c. moles