

Reading For Context Clues

And Vocabulary Growth

Mastering Reading Through Reasoning

Dr. Arthur Whimbey

Introduction

To understand what you read, you must first know the meanings of the words.

Nothing can disturb your reading more, and confuse you more, than running into one unfamiliar word after another.

One way to increase your understanding of the vocabulary in reading material is to use context clues that surround the word.

What are context clues?

Context clues are hints you can find about a word's meaning by looking carefully at the other words in a sentence.

Example:

Gerard was so hungry that for lunch he consumed three sandwiches and a quart of milk.

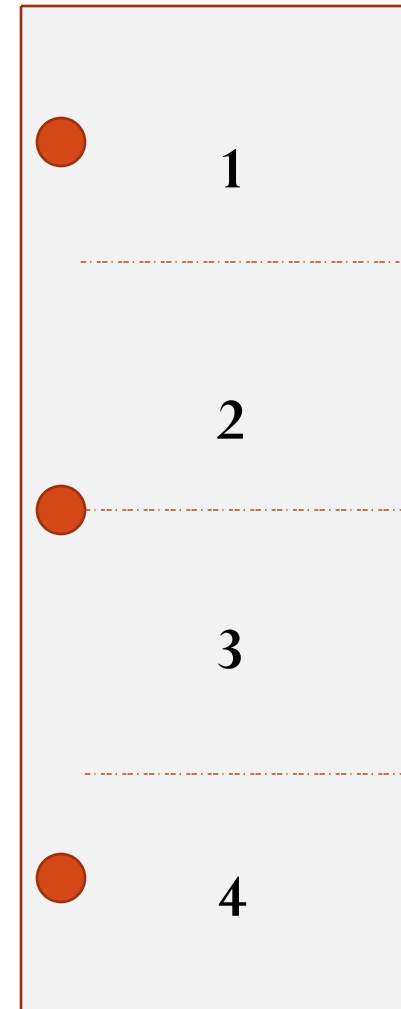
The sentence gives context clues (hints) that Gerard was hungry.

He did something with 3 sandwiches and a quart of milk.

You can assume that **consume** must mean “ate and drank.”

Context Clues Resource

- Use the folded and cut paper you were handed to create this resource.
- In the top section (1) – label it:
CONTEXT CLUES WITH PUNCTUATION
- In the second section from the top (2) – label it :
CONTEXT CLUES WITHOUT PUNCTUATION
- In the third section from the top (3) – label it:
CONTEXT CLUES BY CONTRAST
- In the bottom section (4) – label it:
CONTEXT CLUES INFERRED



I Meaning Stated With Punctuation

The simplest kind of context clue is when punctuation marks have been used to set off the meaning of a key word from the rest of the words in the sentence.

Some of the punctuation used to set off meanings are:

a dash or hyphen -- parentheses () commas ,

Use of the dash, hyphen and Comma

The “Swamp Fox” got his nickname because he was **elusive** — hard to pin down and catch.



- The meaning of elusive is stated in the sentence.
- It is set off by a dash.
- Elusive means “hard to pin down and catch.”



Use of parentheses

Eating properly helps you **maintain** (keep up) your health.



- The meaning of maintain is stated in the sentence.
- It is set off by parentheses.
- “Maintain” means “keep up.”

Page 3



Use of the comma

The teacher asked Lou to stay after school because he pulled a **jape**, practical joke, on the principal.



- The meaning of “jape” is stated in the sentence.
- It is set off by commas.
- “Jape” means “practical joke.”

page 3



Identify the type of punctuation used to set off the meaning of the highlighted word and define the word.

- Many soldiers lost their lives in the **conflict**, or war, between the North and the South.

Set off by commas, conflict means war.

- The bottle's capacity, the amount of liquid it can hold, can be measured in ounces or milliliters.

Set off by commas, capacity means the amount of liquid it can hold. Page 4

II Meaning Stated Without Punctuation

In Case I, you learned how the definition of a word is often stated in a sentence **with** the use of punctuation marks.

In Case II, the **meaning of the word** is again stated **in the sentence. BUT** in this case it is **NOT** set off by punctuation marks.

A sentence which contains the meaning of the word **not** set off by punctuation.

Farm country has its own special **aroma** and when I notice that **smell** I know I'm close to home and far from the city.

The word “and” tells us something similar is coming.

But the location is not the same so something else is similar.

The sentence mentions the farm's aroma, then it talks about that aroma as “that smell.”

This context clue shows that “aroma” means “smell.”

What is the meaning of infection?

Dying from an infection was common until modern medicines were developed that could stop the spread of disease in the body.

- The clue in this sentence tells you that an “infection” **was** common **until** medicines were developed.
- The medicine stopped the **spread of disease** or infection.
- This type of context clue is often used in textbooks. Read your textbooks carefully!

Build your skills figuring out word meaning stated “without punctuation.”

Traveling abroad is educational because you can learn a lot
from seeing how people in other countries live.

The clue word because tells you that “abroad” means “other countries.”

Continue building your skills figuring out word meaning stated “without punctuation.”

My argument that the project would be too expensive for us to do was also the objection of others.

The context clue is “also” which tells us the synonym for objection is argument.

Try a few more!

- Tracy held the flower as gently as she could, fearing that the delicate stem would break.

Delicate means gently.

Let's Try Again!

- **Owls** are nocturnal. **They** fly around and look for food at night.
 - What is the subject in both sentences?
 - When do owls fly around in the second sentence?
 - What does nocturnal mean?

Let's Try a Couple More.

[

- When we came into the classroom and saw the little candy bars on our desks, I **misconstrued** it to mean that we should eat the candy bars before waiting for instructions. I only realized my error after chewing up mine.
- How will you determine the meaning of misconstrued?

III Meaning Given by Contrast

Cases I and II showed how a word's meaning is often stated clearly in the other words of a sentence.

In Case III, a word's meaning is again given in the sentence; BUT in this case it is given by contrast in the sentence.

A contrast is a word or idea that is *the opposite of* the key word.

Contrast Signal Words:

but

different from

however

rather

yet

although

though

while

Looking for contrast to define words

You should not linger in the theater but should leave immediately when the movie is over.

- Locate the contrast signal word.
- Leave immediately, the contrast of linger, follows “but.”
- Think about the opposite of “leave immediately.”
- The meaning of linger is to “hang around.”

In this sentence, the meaning of “unintelligible” is contrasted and an example is given.

You should try to write clearly because if your writing is unintelligible people will not understand what you mean to say.

- First, an explanation for writing clearly is given.
- In the explanation, writing “clearly” is contrasted by unintelligible.
- Then an example of unintelligible is given – “people will not understand” what you wrote.
- Therefore, “unintelligible” means “unclear, not able to be understood.”

Build your word skills by figuring out word meaning by contrast.

- Brad made a **cursory** effort to finish his homework. This was unlike him; usually he worked hard to finish before dinner.

Continue building your word skills by figuring out meaning by contrast.

- We were all pretty apathetic during the movie about animals, but we became interested when it started showing all the tricks the dogs could do.

Contrast Clues

- Some people feel perplexed by brain teasers, while others figure them out quickly.
 - What word are we defining?
 - What is the contrast phrase?
 - What does the clue tell you? Are they the same or different?
 - What two things are being compared?
 - HOW are the things different?
 - What is the meaning of perplexed?

Contrast Clues

- Although Tom was anxious about the test, Tina was not worried at all.
 - What word needs to be defined?
 - What is the contrast phrased?
 - What is being compared?
 - HOW are they different?
 - What does anxious mean?

- **Even though** John had a good job and a nice family, he **yearned** for more.
- **Unlike** her older brother Jerome, who stayed out all hours of the night, Kate **obediently** followed the curfew her parents set.

IV Meaning Inferred From Ideas in the Sentence

- Inference = what I read + what I already know



Make a list of all the things you see?

What do you already know about the things you see?

Now make a guess as to what is going on in this picture.

IV Meaning Inferred From Ideas in the Sentence

- In context clues Cases I, II and III you learned that the definition can be stated directly in the other words in the sentence.
- When you come across an unfamiliar word in your reading you should always look for these direct context clues.

The Difference :

- In some sentences the meaning of an unfamiliar word will not be directly stated in the sentence.
- You can still figure out the meaning of the word by thinking about the ideas in the sentence.

An example:

The diver knew she had won first place when her last dive scored a perfect 10.0, and her **elation** showed when she hugged her teammates.

- The sentence said she won first place and hugged her teammates.
- You can infer from these ideas that “elation” must mean “great happiness or joy.”

Another example:

The football star let his agent **negotiate** with the team owner about a change in his contract.

- Activate Prior Knowledge – think about what you know about football stars, agents and team owners.
- An agent usually “bargains” with the owner on behalf of his client (football star).
- So, we can infer that negotiate means bargain or discuss hoping to agree.

Build your word skills figuring out word meaning by inferring:

Good tools are essential for a car mechanic because they turn otherwise hard jobs into easy work. ↑

Notice the word “because,” it explains why the tools are “essential.”
Essential must mean necessary.

Continue building your word skills figuring word meaning by inferring:

Because the diamond had a flaw it was less valuable.

If the diamond is LESS valuable because of the flaw, a flaw cannot be something good. A flaw must mean a defect.

- Since it was a school day, Denise thought it was **peculiar** that she saw no children on the street during her drive to work.
- Vince had to put his sun glasses on because the rays of the sun were so **brilliant**.