

Using Context Clues

Introduction

Sometimes as you read, you may come to a word or a phrase that you don't understand. Often, you can determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word from its context, the words and sentences around it.

- Different kinds of context clues help readers figure out the meanings of words.

Context Clue	Example
Definition is, or which is, means	The land pulls in opposite directions along a fault, which is a crack in the earth's crust.
Example for example, for instance, such as	Geoscientists, such as geologists and seismologists, study earthquakes.
Comparison like, similar, also, as well	Like a large earthquake, smaller seismic events may also be destructive.
Contrast but, or, yet, in spite of, however, whereas, although	In spite of the chaos caused by an earthquake, order is eventually restored.

- A word's position and function in a sentence can also be a clue to its meaning. What is the meaning of geometrometry in this sentence?

Scientists measure the geometrometry of earthquakes.

Geometrometry isn't a real word! But if it were, you could figure out something about its meaning from its use in the sentence. Since it comes after the word the, you know that geometrometry is a noun. And because of its use in the sentence, you also know that it is probably an observable "thing"—something scientists can measure.

Guided Practice

Underline the context clue that can help you figure out the meaning of each underlined word or phrase. Write the meaning on a separate piece of paper.

Hint

A context clue is often in the same sentence as an unfamiliar word.

The clue may also be in a sentence that comes before or after the sentence that includes the difficult word.

Before they strike land, tornadoes can often be detected by Doppler radar, an electronic system that measures wind speeds. A tornado begins when a wind system forms a huge vortex. This formation is similar to water swirling toward a drain. This condition may trigger multiple tornadoes, which may occur simultaneously or one after the other. Whereas many regions are fairly safe from tornadoes, others are susceptible to them. Communities in tornado-prone areas try to mitigate their risk. For instance, they establish public warning systems.

Common Core Practice

For numbers 1–4, use context clues to answer the questions about each paragraph.

Answer Form

1	☐ A	☐ B	☐ C	☐ D
2	☐ A	☐ B	☐ C	☐ D
3	☐ A	☐ B	☐ C	☐ D
4	☐ A	☐ B	☐ C	☐ D

Number / 4
Correct.

The wind velocity, or speed of motion, in a violent tornado can reach 300 miles per hour. The effects of such a storm can be catastrophic, killing people and destroying wildlife. Within as little as a few seconds, a tornado can devastate a town in its path.

1 What does the word velocity mean in the paragraph?

- A position
- B change in direction
- C swiftness
- D size of something

When weather forecasters predict a tornado, it is advisable for people threatened by the storm to find safe shelter. If the storm destroys property, emergency workers will do their best to accommodate storm victims. For example, they will set up shelters for those who lost homes.

3 What does the word accommodate mean?

- A to provide with something needed
- B to soothe and comfort
- C to give necessary information
- D to investigate in order to report on

4 What words from the paragraph helped you figure out the meaning of accommodate?

- A "When weather forecasters predict a tornado"
- B "people threatened by the storm"
- C "emergency workers will do their best"
- D "set up shelters for those who lost homes"