

Context Clues

Figuring Out What Words Mean

1) DEFINITION: <i>The meaning of the unfamiliar word is stated in the sentence.</i>	
Signal Words & Punctuation	Sample Sentences
<i>is, are, has</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A <u>proton</u> <i>is</i> a positively charge particle in the nucleus of an atom. ▪ <u>Carnivores</u> <i>are</i> animals and plants that eat meat. ▪ A person who is afraid of crowds <i>has</i> <u>agoraphobia</u>.
<i>means</i>	A <u>democracy</u> <i>means</i> that all the people form the government.
<i>defined as</i>	The <u>denouement</u> <i>is</i> defined as the resolution of the story.
2) EXAMPLE: <i>The unfamiliar word is explained through examples.</i>	
<i>such as</i>	Many animals have <u>mottled</u> coats, <i>such as</i> the leopard, the ocelot, and the giraffe.
<i>for example</i>	He often was <u>tenacious</u> . <i>For example</i> , one time he climbed a mountain in a brutal storm, even after losing his food.
<i>for instance</i>	Some animals are <u>omnivores</u> . Bears, <i>for instance</i> , eat whatever meat or plants they can find.
<i>once</i>	He was <u>zealous</u> . <i>Once</i> , he sat on the courthouse steps for a week to get the city to change a law.
<i>in one case</i>	Many are <u>xenophobes</u> . <i>In one case</i> , a woman avoided people for two years.
<i>one time</i>	His <u>loquacious</u> speeches were famous. <i>One time</i> , he talked for three hours.
3) RESTATEMENT: <i>The unfamiliar word is shown to be similar to a familiar word.</i>	
<i>likewise</i>	Jan looked at him with <u>disdain</u> . <i>Likewise</i> , he despised her.
<i>especially</i>	The war <u>decimated</u> the population. The South was <i>especially</i> short on labor in the years that followed.
<i>or</i>	The <u>antediluvian</u> , <i>or</i> ancient, carvings told us nothing.
<i>in that</i>	She was <u>adroit</u> at her job <i>in that</i> she could finish it in half the time of her coworkers.
<i>similarly</i>	Peregrine falcons <u>migrate</u> from pole to pole each year. <i>Similarly</i> , humpback whales make a long journey south each winter to breed.
<i>in other words</i>	His <u>aphasia</u> did not hinder him. <i>In other words</i> , his inability to speak didn't keep him from effectively communicating.
<i>that is</i>	His simple glance was a <u>harbinger</u> of danger. <i>That is</i> , his eyes were signs foretelling rough waters in their relationship.
a phrase set apart between commas	She used a <u>metronome</u> , a small machine that ticked out the timing of the music, as she practiced her violin.

4) CONTRAST: The unfamiliar word is shown to be different, or the opposite, from a familiar word.

<i>some ..., but others...</i>	Some believe that the man was <u>altruistic</u> until the end, <i>but others</i> say that he gave only for selfish reasons.
<i>on the other hand</i>	She was <u>audacious</u> . <i>On the other hand</i> , he was timid and meek.
<i>not</i>	Francine was <i>not</i> <u>blithe</u> at all. She was sad and serious.
<i>despite</i>	Now they were confident, <i>despite</i> her usual <u>diffidence</u> .
<i>although</i>	He acts as if he agrees with the government, <i>although</i> I know about his <u>iconoclastic</u> beliefs.
<i>yet</i>	Its power seemed <u>immutable</u> , <i>yet</i> one day, it ended.
<i>but</i>	The gray kitten was <u>lethargic</u> in the morning, <i>but</i> at night he was quite lively and awake.
<i>by contrast</i>	She was quite <u>efficacious</u> in her job. <i>By contrast</i> , her brother wasn't able to do his work.
<i>then again</i>	Some liked his <u>laconic</u> speeches. <i>Then again</i> , others preferred longer and more detailed orations.
<i>and then</i>	We were getting along fine, <i>and then</i> we had our first <u>altercation</u> .

5) CAUSE & EFFECT: The unfamiliar word's meaning can be inferred from cause-and-effect relationships in the text.

<i>therefore</i>	It <u>occluded</u> my vision; <i>therefore</i> , I crashed.
<i>for this reason</i>	She was a <u>neophyte</u> . <i>For this reason</i> , she had much to learn.
<i>in this way</i>	The shell was <u>petrified</u> . <i>In this way</i> , it was preserved in stone for millions of years.
<i>consequently</i>	They were a <u>bellicose</u> race. <i>Consequently</i> , their wars with neighboring nations depleted their resources.
<i>given</i>	<i>Given</i> the <u>paucity</u> of resources, she couldn't find enough information for her report.
<i>resulting in</i>	He had a <u>proclivity</u> for getting into trouble, <i>resulting in</i> frequent detentions.
<i>such that</i>	The insects were <u>rapacious</u> <i>such that</i> nothing in their path was left uneaten.
<i>this is due to</i>	He has a <u>saturnine</u> outlook on life. <i>This is due to</i> the death of his friend.

“SCUBA” WORD MEANINGS

S	Sound it out. Say the word out loud to yourself a couple of times. Does it make sense in the sentence?
C	Check the Clues in the sentence and paragraph and think about what word would fit best in place of the unknown word.
U	Use the text's main idea and the pictures to make a good guess for the word's meaning.
B	Break the word into parts that you recognize, and/or think of similar words that you know.
A	Ask for help from a peer or adult, or use the glossary or dictionary.

