

CONTEXT CLUES

These are the most common types of context clues: 1) examples, 2) synonyms, 3) antonyms, and 4) the general sense of the passage.

1. **EXAMPLES:** These can be explanations or examples that show what the word means.
 - a. There was obvious animosity between Carmen and Jack; they glared at each other and refused to speak when they saw each other at the party.
 - b. The neighborhood is so affluent that there are Olympic-sized swimming pools, tennis courts, and luxury courts on most properties.

2. **SYNONYMS:** These are words that mean the same as the unknown word; they are often set off by punctuation (commas, dashes or parentheses), sometimes accompanied by "or" or "that is."
 - a. Gaining the help of a mentor—that is, a wise and trusted advisor—is helpful when starting a new job.
 - b. Kim had fortified the walls of her sand castle with aluminum cans, but that hadn't strengthened them

3. **ANTONYMS:** These words and phrases that mean the opposite of a word are often signaled by contrast words such as but, however, yet, on the other hand, or comparison words such as more than, less than, better than, etc.
 - a. Novices at bowling throw more gutter balls than people who are experienced at the game.
 - b. Teachers who commend students for their successes often achieve better results than those who only criticize students for their failures.

4. GENERAL SENSE OF THE PASSAGE: This type of context clue requires you to draw conclusions based on the information given. Asking yourself questions about the meaning of the passage can help.
- a. One argument against capital punishment is that if an innocent person is executed, the mistake cannot be rectified. [Question: What cannot be done about a mistake as final as an execution?]
 - b. It took two days for volunteers to extricate the little girl from the bottom of the well.

Exercise: Using context clues only, guess the meaning of the underlined words in the sentences below. Write what you think it means in the space provided.

1. The dean was adamant: "Pass the writing proficiency test, or you won't graduate, and that's final."
meaning: _____
2. Several things about the library make it conducive to study: good lighting, noise control, and access to information.
meaning: _____
3. After the funeral, the widow's friends were very solicitous—they came to see her every day, often brought food and took turns calling every evening to be sure she was all right.
meaning: _____
4. As members of the President's staff were charged with various crimes, public's confidence in the government eroded. And once the public trust wears down, it is difficult to rebuild.
meaning: _____

5. Imagine my chagrin when I looked in the mirror right after giving my presentation and realized that I had mustard on my face.

meaning: _____

6. Did you plan to meet your brother for lunch, or was your meeting at the restaurant fortuitous?

meaning: _____

7. We firmly believed that Uncle Albert would be found innocent in court, so we were not surprised when the jury exonerated him.

meaning: _____

8. Five-year-old Amanda hid shyly behind her mother when she met new people, but her twin brother Adam was very gregarious.

meaning: _____

9. When people are stressed, they often regress. My nine-year-old brother, for instance, started to suck his thumb when he went away to camp—something he hadn't done since he was four years old.

meaning: _____

10. The noise in the day-care center was incessant; the crying, laughing, and yelling never stopped for a minute.

meaning: _____