

COMPETENCY 1.0 UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF COMMON VOCABULARY WORDS AND STRATEGIES FOR DERIVING THE MEANING OF UNFAMILIAR WORDS

Skill 1.1 Identify meaning of words or phrases in context

Context clues help readers determine the meaning of words they are not familiar with. The context of a word is the sentence or sentences that surround the word.

Read the following sentences and attempt to determine the meanings of the words in bold print.

The **luminosity** of the room was so incredible that there was no need for lights.

If there was no need for lights then one must assume that the word *luminosity* has something to do with giving off light. The definition of *luminosity* is: the emission of light.

Jamie could not understand Joe's feelings. His mood swings made understanding him somewhat of an **enigma**.

The fact that he could not be understood made him somewhat of a puzzle. The definition of *enigma* is: a mystery or puzzle.

Familiarity with word roots (the basic elements of words) and with prefixes can also help one determine the meanings of unknown words.

Following is a partial list of roots and prefixes. It might be useful to review these.

<u>Root</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Example</u>
aqua	water	aqualung
astro	stars	astrology
bio	life	biology
carn	meat	carnivorous
circum	around	circumnavigate
geo	earth	geology
herb	plant	herbivorous
mal	bad	malicious
neo	new	neonatal
tele	distant	telescope

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Example</u>
un-	not	unnamed
re-	again	reenter
il-	not	illegible
pre-	before	preset
mis-	incorrectly	misstate
in-	not	informal
anti-	against	antiwar
de-	opposite	derail
post-	after	postwar
ir-	not	irresponsible

Word Forms

Sometimes a very familiar word can appear as a different part of speech. You may have heard that *fraud* involves a criminal misrepresentation, so when it appears as the adjective form *fraudulent* (He was suspected of fraudulent activities) you can make an educated guess.

You probably know that something out of date is *obsolete*; therefore, when you read about built-in *obsolescence*, you can detect the meaning of the unfamiliar word.

Practice Questions: Read the following sentences and determine the meanings of the underlined words.

- Farmer John got a two-horse plow and went to work. Straight furrows stretched out behind him.

The word furrows means

- long cuts made by plow
- vast, open fields
- rows of corn
- pairs of hitched horses

- The survivors struggled ahead, shambling through the terrible cold, doing their best not to fall.

The word shambling means

- frozen in place
- running
- shivering uncontrollably
- walking awkwardly

Answers:

1. Answer A is correct. The words “straight” and the expression “stretched out behind him” are your clues.

2. Answer D is correct. The words “ahead” and “through” are your clues.

Sentence Clues

Context clues can appear within the sentence itself, within the preceding and/or following sentence(s), or in the passage as a whole. The context for a word is the written passage that surrounds it. Sometimes the writer offers synonyms—words that have nearly the same meaning.

Often, a writer will actually **define** a difficult or particularly important word for you the first time it appears in a passage. Phrases like *that is*, *such as*, *which is*, or *is called* might announce the writer’s intention to give just the definition you need. Occasionally, a writer will simply use a synonym (a word that means the same thing) or near-synonym joined by the word *or*. Look at the following examples:

The *credibility, that is to say the believability*, of the witness was called into question by evidence of previous perjury.

Nothing would *assuage or lessen* the child’s grief.

Punctuation at the sentence level is often a clue to the meaning of a word. Commas, parentheses, quotation marks and dashes tell the reader that a definition is being offered by the writer.

A tendency toward *hyperbole, extravagant exaggeration*, is a common flaw among persuasive writers.

Political *apathy - lack of interest* - can lead to the death of the state.

A writer might simply give an **explanation** in other words that you can understand, in the same sentence:

The *xenophobic* townspeople were *suspicious of every foreigner*.

Writers also explain a word in terms of its opposite at the sentence level:

His *incarceration* was ended, and he was elated to be *out of jail*.

Adjacent Sentence Clues

The context for a word goes beyond the sentence in which it appears. At times, the writer uses adjacent (adjoining) sentences to present an explanation or definition:

The 200 dollars for the car repair would have to come out of the *contingency* fund. Fortunately, Angela's father had taught her to keep some *money set aside for just such emergencies*.

Analysis: The second sentence offers a clue to the definition of *contingency* as used in this sentence: "emergencies." Therefore, a fund for contingencies would be money tucked away for unforeseen and/or urgent events.

Entire Passage Clues

On occasion, you must look at an entire paragraph or passage to figure out the definition of a word or term. In the following paragraph, notice how the word *nostalgia* undergoes a form of extended definition throughout the selection rather than in just one sentence.

The word *nostalgia* links Greek words for "away from home" and "pain." If you're feeling *nostalgic*, then, you are probably in some physical distress or discomfort, suffering from a feeling of alienation and separation from love ones or loved places. *Nostalgia* is that awful feeling you remember, the first time you went away to camp or spent the weekend with a friend's family—homesickness, or some condition even more painful than that. But in common use, *nostalgia* has come to have more sentimental associations. A few years back, for example, a *nostalgia* craze had to do with the 1950s. We resurrected poodle skirts and saddle shoes, built new restaurants to look like old ones, and tried to make chicken a la king just as mother probably never made it. In TV situation comedies, we recreated a pleasant world that probably never existed and relished our *nostalgia*, longing for a homey, comfortable lost time.

Skill 1.2 Recognize synonyms and antonyms for words

Synonyms are words that have similar meanings. Sometimes, synonyms can be used to in place of another word to make a draft more appealing or descriptive. As teachers, you should encourage your students to use appropriate synonyms when drafting or revising their work to expand a written work's interest and imagery. Paper or computer thesauruses are helpful in incorporating synonyms into one's writing.

Examples of synonyms:

Happy – gay, joyful, ecstatic, content, cheerful

Angry – irritated, fuming, livid, irate, annoyed

Beautiful - gorgeous, attractive, striking

However, you will want to alert students that sometimes one word cannot be simply replaced by another just because it was listed as a synonym. Sometimes the meaning or the connotation will vary somewhat. For example, in the sentence, “Harold was *angry* when his brother spilled finger paint on his book report,” replacing *angry* with *fuming* would be a better choice than *annoyed* as the words describe the situation a little differently. As you work with students, help students expand their vocabularies so they know which synonyms to use.

Antonyms are words that have opposite meanings. Like synonyms, thesauruses will help students identify words that are antonyms.

Examples of antonyms:

Sad – cheerful, delighted

Angry - calm, content

Beautiful – ugly, repulsive, hideous

Skill 1.3 Recognize correct use of commonly misused words (e.g., their/they're, to/too)

Students frequently encounter problems with homonyms—words that are spelled and pronounced the same as another but that have different meanings such as *mean*, a verb, “to intend”; *mean* an adjective, “unkind”; and *mean* a noun or adjective, “average.” These words are actually both homonyms and homographs (written the same way).

A similar phenomenon that causes trouble is heteronyms (also sometimes called heterophones), words that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations and meanings (in other words, they are homographs that differ in pronunciation or, technically, homographs that are not homophones).

For example, the homographs *desert* (abandon) and *desert* (arid region) are heteronyms (pronounced differently); but *mean* (intend) and *mean* (average) are not. They are pronounced the same, or are homonyms.

Another similar occurrence in English is the capitonym, a word that is spelled the same but has different meanings when it is capitalized and may or may not have different pronunciations. Example: *polish* (to make shiny) and *Polish* (from Poland).

Find more troublesome words at
An English Homophone Dictionary
<http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/writing/homophone.htm>

Some of the most troubling homonyms are those that are spelled differently but sound the same. Examples: *its* (3d person singular neuter pronoun) and *it's* ("it is"); *there*, *their* (3d person plural pronoun) and *they're* ("they are"). Others: *to*, *too*, *two*.

Some homonyms/homographs are particularly complicated and troubling. Fluke, for instance is a fish, a flatworm, the end parts of an anchor, the fins on a whale's tail, and a stroke of luck.

Commonly Misused Words

Accept is a verb meaning to receive or to tolerate. **Except** is usually a preposition meaning excluding. Except is also a verb meaning to exclude.

Advice is a noun meaning recommendation. **Advise** is a verb meaning to recommend.

Affect is usually a verb meaning to influence. **Effect** is usually a noun meaning result. Effect can also be a verb meaning to bring about.

An **allusion** is an indirect reference. An **illusion** is a misconception or false impression.

Add is a verb to mean to put together. **Ad** is a noun that is the abbreviation for the word advertisement.

Ain't is a common nonstandard contraction for the contraction aren't.

Allot is a verb meaning to distribute. **A lot** can be an adverb that means often, or to a great degree. It can also mean a large quantity.

Allowed is an adjective that means permitted. **Aloud** is an adverb that means audibly.

Bare is an adjective that means naked or exposed. It can also indicate a minimum. As a noun, **bear** is a large mammal. As a verb, bear means to carry a heavy burden.

Capitol refers to a city, capitol to a building where lawmakers meet. **Capital** also refers to wealth or resources.

A **chord** is a noun that refers to a group of musical notes. **Cord** is a noun meaning rope or a long electrical line.

Compliment is a noun meaning a praising or flattering remark. **Complement** is a noun that means something that completes or makes perfect.

Climactic is derived from climax, the point of greatest intensity in a series or progression of events. **Climatic** is derived from climate; it refers to meteorological conditions.

Discreet is an adjective that means tactful or diplomatic; **discrete** is an adjective that means separate or distinct.

Dye is a noun or verb used to indicate artificially coloring something. **Die** is a verb that means to pass away. Die is also a noun that means a cube-shaped game piece.

Elicit is a verb meaning to bring out or to evoke. **Illicit** is an adjective meaning unlawful

Emigrate means to leave one country or region to settle in another. **Immigrate** means to enter another country and reside there.

Hoard is a verb that means to accumulate or store up. **Horde** is a large group.

Lead /lĕd/ is a verb that means to guide or serve as the head of. It is also a noun /lĕd/ that is a type of metal.

Medal is a noun that means an award that is strung round the neck. **Meddle** is a verb that means to involve oneself in a matter without right or invitation. **Metal** is an element such as silver or gold. **Mettle** is a noun meaning toughness or guts.

Morning is a noun indicating the time between midnight and midday. **Mourning** is a verb or noun pertaining to the period of grieving after a death.

Past is a noun meaning a time before now (past, present and future). **Passed** is past tense of the verb "to pass."

Piece is a noun meaning a portion. **Peace** is a noun meaning the opposite of war.

Peak is a noun meaning the tip or height to reach the highest point. **Peek** is a verb that means to take a brief look. **Pique** is a verb meaning to incite or raise interest.

Principal is a noun meaning the head of a school or an organization or a sum of money. **Principle** is a noun meaning a basic truth or law.

Rite is a noun meaning a special ceremony. **Right** is an adjective meaning correct or direction. **Write** is a verb meaning to compose in writing.

Than is a conjunction used in comparisons; **then** is an adverb denoting time. That pizza is more than I can eat. Tom laughed, and then we recognized him.

Here's a mnemonic device to remember the difference. *Than* is used to *compare*; both words have the letter *a* in them. *Then* tells *when*; both are spelled the same, except for the first letter.

There is an adverb specifying place; it is also an expletive. Adverb: Sylvia is lying there unconscious. Expletive: *There* are two plums left. **Their** is a possessive pronoun. **They're** is a contraction of they are. Fred and Jane finally washed *their* car. *They're* later than usual today.

To is a preposition; **too** is an adverb; **two** is a number.

Your is a possessive pronoun; **you're** is a contraction of you are.

Other Confusing Words

Among is a preposition to be used with three or more items. **Between** is to be used with two items.

Between you and me, I cannot tell the difference among those three Johnson sisters.

As is a subordinating conjunction used to introduce a subordinating clause; **like** is a preposition and is followed by a noun or a noun phrase.

As I walked to the lab, I realized that the recent experiment findings were much like those we found last year.

Can is a verb that means to be able. **May** is a verb that means to have permission. They are only interchangeable in cases of possibility.

I can lift 250 pounds.
May I go to Alex's house?

Lie is an intransitive verb meaning to recline or rest on a surface. Its principal parts are lie, lay, lain. **Lay** is a transitive verb meaning to put or place. Its principal parts are lay, laid.

Birds lay eggs.
I lie down for bed around 10 p.m.

Set is a transitive verb meaning to put or to place. Its principal parts are set, set, set. **Sit** is an intransitive verb meaning to be seated. Its principal parts are sit, sat, sat.

I set my backpack down near the front door.
They sat in the park until the sun went down.

Problem Phrases

Correct	Incorrect
Anyway	Anyways
Come to see me	Come and see me
Could have, would have, should have	Could of, would of, should of
Couldn't care less	Could care less
En route	In route
For all intents and purposes	For all intensive purposes
Regardless	Irregardless
Second, Third	Secondly, Thirdly
Supposed to	Suppose to
Toward	Towards
Try to	Try and
Used to	Use to

COMPETENCY 2.0 UNDERSTAND HOW TO INTERPRET AND ANALYZE A WIDE RANGE OF TEXTS

Skill 2.1 Identify the main idea of a passage

The main idea of a passage or paragraph is the basic message, idea, point concept, or meaning that the author wants to convey to you, the reader. Understanding the main idea of a passage or paragraph is the key to understanding the more subtle components of the author's message. The main idea is what is being said about a topic or subject. Once you have identified the basic message, you will have an easier time answering other questions that test critical skills.

Main ideas are either *stated* or *implied*. A *stated main idea* is explicit: it is directly expressed in a sentence or two in the paragraph or passage. An *implied main idea* is suggested by the overall reading selection. In the first case, you need not pull information from various points in the paragraph or passage in order to form the main idea because it is already stated by the author. If a main idea is implied, however, you must formulate, in your own words, a main idea statement by condensing the overall message contained in the material itself.

Practice Question: Read the following passage and select an answer

Sometimes too much of a good thing can become a very bad thing indeed. In an earnest attempt to consume a healthy diet, dietary supplement enthusiasts have been known to overdose. Vitamin C, for example, long thought to help people ward off cold viruses, is currently being studied for its possible role in warding off cancer and other disease that causes tissue degeneration. Unfortunately, an overdose of vitamin C—more than 10,000 mg—on a daily basis can cause nausea and diarrhea. Calcium supplements, commonly taken by women, are helpful in warding off osteoporosis. More than just a few grams a day, however, can lead to stomach upset and even kidney and bladder stones. Niacin, proven useful in reducing cholesterol levels, can be dangerous in large doses to those who suffer from heart problems, asthma or ulcers.

The main idea expressed in this paragraph is:

- A. supplements taken in excess can be a bad thing indeed
- B. dietary supplement enthusiasts have been known to overdose
- C. vitamins can cause nausea, diarrhea, and kidney or bladder stones
- D. people who take supplements are preoccupied with their health