

DOMAIN I.

READING COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

COMPETENCY 1.0

UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES

Skill 1.1 Use context clues to determine the meaning of a word with multiple meanings.

Context clues help readers determine the meanings of unfamiliar words. 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 were 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 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
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. For example, you may have heard that *fraud* involves a criminal misrepresentation, so when it appears as the adjective form *fraudulent*, (e.g., "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 You probably know that something out-of-date is *obsolete*; therefore, when you read about "built-in *obsolescence*," you can detect the meaning of the unfamiliar word.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 attempt to determine the meanings of the underlined words.

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

The word furrows means

- (A) long cuts made by a plow
- (B) vast, open fields
- (C) rows of corn
- (D) pairs of hitched horses

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

The word shambling means

- (A) frozen in place
- (B) running
- (C) shivering uncontrollably
- (D) walking awkwardly

Answers:

1. (A) is the correct answer. The word *straight* and the expression *stretched out behind him* are your clues.
2. (D) is the correct answer. The words *ahead* and *through* are your clues.

Skill 1.2 Use the context of a paragraph or passage to determine the meaning of words or phrases.

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 two 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 are feeling nostalgic, then you are probably in some physical distress or discomfort, suffering from a feeling of alienation and separation from loved 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. However, in common use, nostalgia has come to have associations that are more sentimental. 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 à 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 1.3 Identify synonyms or antonyms for words in a passage.

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

Sentence clues

Often, a writer will actually **define** a difficult or particularly important word for you the first time it appears in a passage. Phrases such as *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 a 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 the writer is offering a definition.

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.

COMPETENCY 2.0

UNDERSTAND THE MAIN IDEA AND SUPPORTING DETAILS IN WRITTEN MATERIAL.

Skill 2.1 Identify the main idea of a paragraph or passage.

Main Idea

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 the author already states it. 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 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.

Answer: Answer A is a paraphrase of the first sentence and provides a general framework for the rest of the paragraph—excess supplement intake is bad. The rest of the paragraph discusses the consequences of taking too many vitamins. Options B and C refer to major details and Option D introduces the idea of preoccupation, which is not included in this paragraph.

Skill 2.2 Establish the sequence of events or steps presented in a passage.

Sequence of Events

The ability to organize events or steps provided in a passage (especially when presented in random order) serves a useful purpose, and it encourages the development of logical thinking and the processes of analysis and evaluation.

One way to identify sequence is to note transition words, such as “first” or “then.” Another clue is to use enumeration to identify the proper order.

Working through and discussing examples, such as the one below, with your students helps students to gain valuable practice in sequencing events.

Practice Question: Identify the proper order of events or steps.

1. Matt had tied a knot in his shoelace.
2. Matt put on his green socks because they were clean and complemented the brown slacks he was wearing.
3. Matt took a bath and trimmed his toenails.
4. Matt put on his brown slacks.

Answer: The proper order of events is 3, 4, 2, and 1.

Skill 2.3 Recognize information, ideas, and details that support the main idea of a paragraph or passage.

Supporting details

Supporting details are examples, facts, ideas, illustrations, cases, and anecdotes used by a writer to explain, expand on, and develop the more general main idea. A writer’s choice of supporting materials is determined by the nature of the topic being covered. Supporting details are specifics that relate directly to the main idea.

Writers select and shape material according to their purposes. An advertisement writer seeking to persuade the reader to buy a particular running shoe, for instance, will emphasize only the positive characteristics of the shoe for advertisement copy. A columnist for a running magazine, on the other hand, might list the good and bad points about the same shoe in an article recommending appropriate shoes for different kinds of runners. Both major details (those that directly support the main idea) and minor details (those that provide interesting, but not always essential, information) help create a well-written and fluid passage.

In the following paragraph, the sentences in **bold print** provide a skeleton of a paragraph on the benefits of recycling. The sentences in bold are generalizations, which by themselves do not explain the need to recycle. The sentences in *italics* add details to SHOW the general points in bold. Notice how the supporting details help you understand the necessity for recycling.

While one day recycling may become mandatory in all states, right now it is voluntary in many communities. *Those of us who participate in recycling are amazed by how much material is recycled.* **For many communities, the blue-box recycling program has had an immediate effect.** *By just recycling glass, aluminum cans, and plastic bottles, we have reduced the volume of disposable trash by one third, thus extending the useful life of local landfills by over a decade. Imagine the difference if those dramatic results were achieved nationwide.* **The amount of reusable items we thoughtlessly dispose of is staggering.** *For example, Americans dispose of enough steel everyday to supply Detroit car manufacturers for three months. Additionally, we dispose of enough aluminum annually to rebuild the nation's air fleet. These statistics, available from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), should encourage all of us to watch what we throw away.* **Clearly, recycling in our homes and in our communities directly improves the environment.**

Notice how the author's supporting examples enhance the message of the paragraph and relate to the author's thesis noted above. If you only read the boldfaced sentences, you have a glimpse at the topic. This paragraph of illustration, however, is developed through numerous details creating specific images: *reduced the volume of disposable trash by one-third, extended the useful life of local landfills by over a decade, enough steel everyday to supply Detroit car manufacturers for three months, enough aluminum to rebuild the nation's air fleet.* If the writer had merely written a few general sentences, as those shown in bold print, you would not fully understand the vast amount of trash involved in recycling or the positive results of current recycling efforts.

Skill 2.4 Recognize a writer's expressed or implied purpose for writing (e.g., to persuade, to describe).

Writer's purpose

An essay is an extended discussion of a writer's point of view about a particular topic. This point of view may be supported by using such writing modes as examples, argument and persuasion, analysis, or comparison/contrast. In any case, a good essay is clear, coherent, well organized, and fully developed.

When an author sets out to write a passage, he/she usually has a purpose for doing so. That purpose may be simply to give information that might be interesting or useful to some reader or other. It may be to persuade the reader to a point of view or to move the reader to act in a particular way. It may be to tell a story, or it may be to describe something in such a way that an experience becomes available to the reader through one of the five senses. Following are the primary devices for expressing a particular purpose in a piece of writing:

- **Basic expository writing** simply gives information not previously known about a topic or is used to explain or define one. Facts, examples, statistics, cause and effect, direct tone, objective rather than subjective delivery, and non-emotional information are presented in a formal manner.
- **Descriptive writing** centers on a person, place, or object, using concrete and sensory words to create a mood or impression and arranging details in a chronological or spatial sequence.
- **Narrative writing** is developed using an incident or anecdote or related series of events. Chronology, the five W's, topic sentence, and conclusion are essential ingredients.
- **Persuasive writing** implies the writer's ability to select vocabulary and arrange facts and opinions in such a way as to direct the actions of the listener/reader. Persuasive writing may incorporate exposition and narration as they illustrate the main idea.
- **Journalistic writing** is theoretically free of author bias. It is essential that it be factual and objective when relaying information about an event, person, or thing. Provide students with an opportunity to examine newspapers and create their own. Many newspapers have educational programs that are offered free to schools.

COMPETENCY 3.0

ANALYZE THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG IDEAS IN WRITTEN MATERIAL.

Skill 3.1 Recognize cause-and-effect relationships in a passage.

A cause is the necessary source of a particular outcome. If a writer were addressing the questions, “How will the new tax laws affect small businesses?” or “Why has there been such political unrest in Somalia?” he or she would use cause and effect as an organizational pattern to structure his or her response. In the first case, the writer would emphasize effects of the tax legislation as they apply to owners of small businesses. In the second, he/she would focus on causes for the current political situation in Somalia.

Some word clues that identify a cause-effect passage are *accordingly, as a result, therefore, because, consequently, hence, in short, thus, then, due to* and *so on*.

Sample passage:

Simply put, inflation is an increase in price levels. It happens when a government prints more currency than is already in circulation, and there is, consequently, additional money available for the same amount of goods or services. There might be multiple reasons for a government to crank up the printing presses. A war, for instance, could cause an immediate need for steel. A national disaster might create a sudden need for social services. To get the money it needs, a government can raise taxes, borrow, or print more currency. However, raising taxes and borrowing are not always plausible options.

Analysis: The paragraph starts with a definition and proceeds to examine a causal chain. The words *consequently, reasons, and cause* provide the clues.

Explicit Cause and Effect

General Hooker failed to anticipate General Lee’s bold flanking maneuver. As a result, Hooker’s army was nearly routed by a smaller force.

Mindy forgot to bring the lunch her father had packed for her. Consequently, she had to borrow money from her friends at school during lunch period.

Implicit Cause and Effect

The engine in Lisa’s airplane began to sputter. She quickly looked below for a field in which to land.

Luther ate the creamed shrimp that had been sitting in the sun for hours. Later that night, he was so sick he had to be rushed to the hospital.

Whenever there are two ideas in opposition, there is the ghost of an "either/or" conceptual basis lurking invisibly in the background of the "pro/con" setting.

For example, one person may argue that automobiles are a safer mode of transportation than are motorcycles and support that contention with statistics showing that fatalities are more frequent per accident in motorcycle crashes than in car crashes.

Skill 3.2 Analyze relationships between ideas in opposition (e.g., pro and con) or in agreement (e.g., reasons to support a claim).

Opposition to argument

The opposition to this argument may counter that while fatalities are more frequent per accident in motorcycle accidents, it is erroneous to over generalize from that statistic that motorcycles are "therefore more dangerous."

Thus, each participant in the argument has assumed a position of "either/or," that is to say, the automobile is "either" safer than the motorcycle, "or" it is not (or the motorcycle is "either" safer than the automobile, "or" it is not). With the argument thus formulated, a conclusion acceptable to both sides is not likely to happen. Here is a short essay showing how to avoid this deadlock.

Which is safer—the car or the motorcycle?

Most experienced drivers would agree that while it is more exhilarating to ride a motorcycle than to drive an automobile, it is illogical to therefore conclude that this exhilaration leads to careless driving and, therefore, more accidents, deaths, and injuries to motorcycle riders than car drivers. The critical concept to be understood here is not exhilaration, which is a given, but how the exhilaration comes about and is a cause of serious injury and death of motorcycle riders.

There is safe and unsafe thrill seeking. "Exhilaration" is defined as the "state of being stimulated, refreshed, or elated." An example of safe exhilaration is the excitement of sledding downhill, which results in the sled rider feeling stimulated, refreshed, and/or elated.

Unsafe exhilaration, which is usually the consequence of reckless thrill seeking, is therefore a state of being over-stimulated, frightened, and depressed by terror.