

Using Context Clues to Find Meaning

Knowing the different types of Context Clues and how to spot them can be helpful when trying to figure out the meaning of new vocabulary. Let's look at the 4 most common types.

DEFINITION

The meaning of the word can be found in the sentence containing the word or the sentence following. The definition usually comes after the new word.

Ex. The arbitrator, the neutral person chosen to settle the dispute, arrived at her decision.

Ex. The artist used the impasto technique in his paintings where he put layers and layers of paint on the canvas.

Ex. The girls languidly put on their jackets as if they had no energy at all.

What is the meaning of each underlined word? Use your highlighter to show where the context clues are.

1. Angela thought the metallic red and orange wallpaper was gaudy. It was very showy in a tasteless way.
2. Martin Luther wrote about why buying indulgences - forgiveness for sins, was wrong.
3. Religions like Hinduism and Buddhism believe in reincarnation, where you are reborn into another life cycle.
4. Terry was obstinate; she was being stubborn and refused to see any movie other than the one she wanted.
5. Greece developed into several city-states, which are cities and the surrounding farmland.

SYNONYM

The sentence uses a similar word to explain the meaning of the new word.

Ex. The baseball coach punished the team's duplicity or deceitfulness after they admitted to using steroids.

Ex. The slender woman was so thin that her clothes were too big on her.

Ex. My opponent's argument is fallacious or misleading.

Use your highlighter to show where similar words are used as context clues in these sentences.

1. Carly is fond of trite, worn-out expressions in her writing. Her favorite is "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."
2. The witness began to prevaricate, or hesitate while being questioned under oath.
3. Jack's duplicity, or crafty dishonesty, caused him to steal his co-workers retirement funds by funneling the money into another account.
4. Mr. Bendschneider has a gregarious, or very outgoing, personality.
5. Nancy is going to be angry when she finds out that Clyde broke the fragile, or easily broken, lamp.

ANTONYM

These sentences use a word with an opposite definition to help give the meaning of the new word.

Ex. Unlike Alyssa's room, which was immaculate, Logan's room was very messy.

Ex. It was Jay's duplicity that caused Colleen to break up with him. Had he been honest, they might still be together.

Ex. Unlike gregarious Mr. Bendschneider's, Mr. Cheramie's personality was more quiet and reserved.

Highlight the antonyms, then write the underlined word's meaning in the space provided.

1. Although some men are loquacious, others hardly talk at all. _____
2. Rather than be involved in clandestine meetings, they did everything quite openly. _____
3. The lady was not sitting primly – she was slouched and hunched over in her chair. _____
4. The man seemed disheartened; he was not his usual smiling and cheerful self. _____
5. Eating Twinkies and Big Macs is harmful to your body while eating fruit is beneficial! _____

EXAMPLES/INFERENCES

These types of clues use examples to help the reader infer meaning from the new word.

Ex. Ecclesiastics, such as priests, ministers, and pastors, should be good behavior models for churchgoers.

Ex. The saturated dog was wet, dripping, and messy after the thunderstorm.

Ex. Constellations such as The Little Dipper, The Big Dipper, and Orion's belt can be seen in the night sky.

Highlight the examples, then write the underlined word's meaning in the space provided.

1. On our trip to the museum, we saw many artifacts like pottery, statues, and tools from Ancient Egypt.

Artifacts: _____

2. Fish, whales, and dolphins are aquatic animals.

Aquatic: _____

3. To illuminate the room, we used candles, flashlights, and lamps.

Illuminate: _____

4. Elliptical shapes such as an oval, a circle, or an egg, have rounded edges.

Elliptical: _____