

# Using Context Clues

You can often determine the meaning of a word from its context - that is, from the way the word is used in a sentence. Since authors may give context clues that help determine the meaning of unfamiliar words, it is important that you know the major types of clues and how to use them.

Type of Clue	Explanation	Example
<b>Definition</b>	The unknown word is connected to a more familiar word or phrase; usually a form of <i>to be</i> is used.	Entomology <b>is</b> the study of insects.
<b>Restatement of Synonym</b>	The meaning is usually right after the unfamiliar word and often separated from the rest of the sentence with commas, dashes, or parentheses; sometimes <i>or</i> , <i>that is</i> , or <i>in other words</i> is used.	Meat eaters, <b>or</b> carnivores, are at the top of the food chain.  She enjoyed biology (the study of living things).
<b>Contrast or Antonym</b>	The unfamiliar word is shown to be different from or unlike another word and is often an opposite; <i>but</i> , <i>however</i> , <i>although</i> , <i>otherwise</i> , <i>unless</i> , <i>instead</i> , <i>on the contrary</i> , <i>on the other hand</i> , <i>while</i> , <i>never</i> , <i>no</i> , or <i>not</i> may be used to signal the contrast.	Mike's parrot was <i>loquacious</i> <b>but</b> Maria's said very little.
<b>Example</b>	The unfamiliar word is cleared up by giving an example: <i>for instance</i> , <i>such as</i> , and <i>for example</i> may be used as signals.	The archeologist found different <i>amulets</i> , <b>such as</b> a rabbit's foot and bags of herbs, near the ancient alter.
<b>List or Series</b>	The unfamiliar word is included in a series of related words that give an idea of the word's meaning.	North American predators include grizzly bears, <i>pumas</i> , wolves, and foxes.
<b>Cause and Effect</b>	The meaning of an unfamiliar word is signaled by a cause-and-effect relationship between ideas in the text.	Due to a <i>dearth</i> of termites, the aardvark starved to death.
<b>Description or Inference</b>	The meaning of an unfamiliar word can be inferred from the description of a situation or experience.	The monkey's <i>vociferous</i> chatter made me wish I had earplugs.
<b>Comparison</b>	The unfamiliar word is shown to be the same as or like another word; <i>too</i> , <i>like</i> , <i>as</i> , <i>similar to</i> , or <i>in the same way</i> may be used to signal the comparison.	My brother is <i>enthralled</i> by birds <b>in the same way</b> that I am fascinated by insects.