

GETTING WORD MEANING FROM CONTEXT

When you come across an unfamiliar word in a sentence, don't just skip over it. Think about the context in which the word appears _____ that is, the other words that surround it. The sentence or passage in which a word appears is called its context.

If you do not know the meaning of the word, you can examine the surrounding phrases and guess the meaning of the word by studying the context.

The candidate for Congress made many promises to his constituents.

If you do not know the meaning of the word constituents, examine the surrounding words such as *candidate*, and *promises*. These two words point to the fact that constituents means "voters" because a candidate for public office usually makes promises to gain votes. The words "*candidate*" and "*promises*" are the clues to the meaning of "*constituents*."

Some women writers in the 1800's used a man's name as a pseudonym so that readers would not know that the author was a woman.

Look for words in the sentence that may explain the meaning of the unfamiliar word pseudonym. The words *women writers used a man's name* give you additional clues that pseudonym might have something to do with using a false name when writing. You might decide that pseudonym means a "false name" or a "pen name." You can't be positive, but you can make an educated guess.

b.) Sometimes the sentence in which an unfamiliar word appears does not provide helpful clues to the meaning of the word. In such a case, other sentences in the paragraph may help. Here is an example in which the meaning of an unfamiliar word is cleared up in a following sentence.

My first attempt at skating was a fiasco. Not only did I fall, but I couldn't even get back up on my skates without help.

What is fiasco? The second sentence gives you clues with words like *fall*, *couldn't get back up . . . without help*. Clearly, the first attempt at skating was not even partly successful. So, you can reasonably conclude that fiasco means "not successful" or "a complete failure." But if you're still in doubt about the meaning of a word when you finish reading a paragraph, reach for your dictionary.

c.) Another way to arrive at the meaning of an unfamiliar word in a sentence is to look for other words in a sentence whose meaning you already know. You may link the familiar words to the unfamiliar word which may be one of

several words in a series of synonyms. The clue is if you know the meaning of at least one of the synonyms in the series, you should be able to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar word.

Example:

The **staid**, serious, and self-restrained manner of the judge had a calming effect on the people in the court room.

Sometimes the unfamiliar word is linked to a familiar word by **and**.

Example:

His attempt to deceive and **defraud** his clients put him in serious trouble.

d.) Sometimes a phrases or clause, not a single word, provides the clue to the meaning of the unfamiliar word.

Example:

The boss believed Martha was quite **remiss** in her office duties, learning much unfinished work at the end of the day.

e.) Sometimes a word that has an opposite meaning with the unfamiliar word gives the clue.

Example:

Raffy is **pessimistic** about the trip to Europe, but the other members of the entourage remain hopeful.

The word **pessimistic** is contrasted with the word **hopeful**. You can then assume that **pessimistic** means **not hopeful**.

ANALYZING WORDS THROUGH AFFIXES

f.) Another way to determine the meaning of a word is by analyzing it through its root, prefix or suffix. Most words have these parts.

root - the main part of the word

prefix - that which is placed before the main word
 suffix - that which is added at the end of the main word

Example:

The root word **sincere** means “honest or truthful.” When the syllable **in** is placed before the word, it negates the meaning and changes it to **insincere** meaning “dishonest or untruthful”. New parts of speech evolve by adding suffixes to the root word.

Adjective	Noun	Adverb
sincere	sincerity	sincerely

Prefixes having a *single* meaning:

bene	-	good
intro	-	into
circum	-	around
mal	-	bad
equi	-	equal
mis	-	wrong
extra	-	outside
non	-	not
intra	-	within
pre	-	before

Prefixes having *more than one* meaning:

in, ir, il, im	-not, or, in
dis	-opposite of, depriving of, parting from, away
sub	-under, below, at the bottom
pro	-before in time or place. Instead of, in favor of
re	-back, again

un -not, the opposite of

The negative prefixes **un**, **non**, and **in** become _____

ir -when affixed to a word beginning with r
(*irregular*)

il -to a word beginning with l (*illegible*)

im -to a word beginning with b, p, m
(*immaterial, impersonate, immobile*)

b4.) **Suffixes** provide more clues to word meanings. Most suffixes appear in nouns and adjectives.

Noun suffixes with specific meanings:

-ana -collection of anecdotes, sayings, or facts relating to a specific subject (*Filipiniana*)

-archy -form of government (*monarchy*)

-ard/art -a person who does something unacceptable (*braggart*)

-cide -killing (*parricide, homicide*)

-ee -receiver of an action or benefit (*interviewee*)

-fication -making, causing (*beautification*)

-ics -science of, practice of (*ethics; logistics*)

-itis -inflammation of (*appendicitis*)

Nouns suffixes that indicate gender:

Masculine

Feminine

aviator

aviatrix

equestrian

equestrienne

comedian

comedienne

fiancé

fiancée

conductor

conductress

Adjective suffixes

-ous) meaning “full of”; “abounding in”

-ose) e.g. beauteous, curvaceous, fruitful

- aceous) comatose
- ful)
- acious) “pertaining to”
- ative) e.g. cautious, prohibitive, angelic
- ive) semestral
- tiousn)
- ic)
- al)

Synonyms are words that have nearly the same meaning although they have shades of difference in meaning. Thus, they should be used appropriately in a sentence.

Example: *fast - swift, quick, rapid, speedy, fleet*

Antonyms are words that are opposite in meaning.

Example	<i>hot</i>	- <i>cold</i>
	<i>happy</i>	- <i>sad, unhappy</i>
	<i>warm</i>	- <i>cool</i>
	<i>many</i>	- <i>few</i>