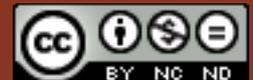


# GUESSING MEANING FROM CONTEXT CLUES



Prof. Julio Palma

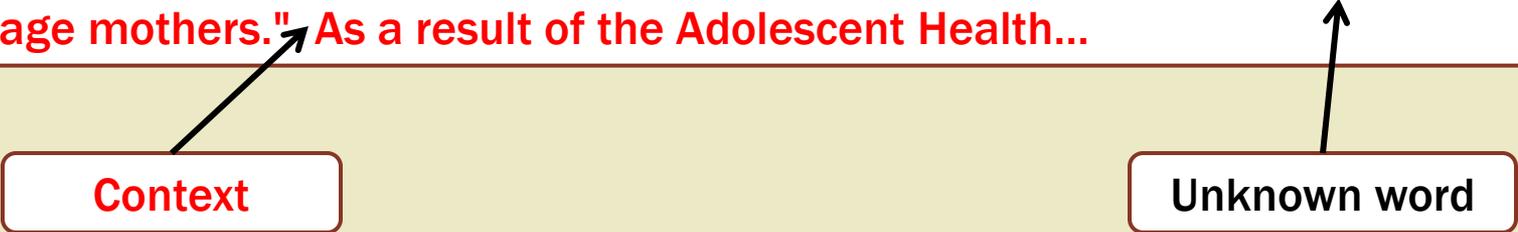


# GUESSING MEANING FROM CONTEXT

The ability to infer the meaning of an **unknown word** by looking at the vocabulary around it or its context is an important reading skill. The context here refers to the sentence or paragraph where the unfamiliar word appears, which provides the reader with information to make sense of the term.

The term "adolescent parents," however, has frequently been a euphemism for "teenage mothers." As a result of the Adolescent Health...

Context



Unknown word

# TYPES OF CONTEXT CLUES

**Context clues are words or phrases in the sentence or paragraph that help the reader to figure out the meaning of the unknown word. There are 4 types of clues you could use to support your reading comprehension.**

- 1. Synonyms**
- 2. Examples and definitions**
- 3. Antonyms and contrast**
- 4. General Knowledge**

# 1. SYNONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

A synonym is a word or phrase that means the same or is very similar to another word. Definitions state or describe the meaning of a word. These two context clues can be used to discover the meaning of an unknown word. But...how?

Tip  
1

- Select the unknown word.
- Identify its the part of speech: is it a verb? A noun? An adjective? etc.
- Check if there is a synonym in the sentence that can provide the same meaning of the unkown word.
- Determine its positive or negative value: Is it a good or a bad thing?

Days after he made a **flippant** remark in class, he regretted sounding so disrespectful.



# 1. SYNONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Signals of synonyms in the text: *means, called, be verbs, that is , , also known as, or, is referred to as, sometimes called, is/are known as, by [ ] is meant.., similar to, can be defined as, commas (,) or dashes (–) and synonyms.*

Tip  
2

- Use these signals to help you identify synonyms or similar phrases that explain the unknown word.
- Bear in mind that the synonym may appear **before or after** these signals.

The Milky Way is littered with **dark obscuring clouds of dust** commonly referred to as "coalsacks."



# SINONYMS AND DEFINITIONS IN TEXTS

1998; Wolfe, 2001) for people who are visually impaired (that is, those who are blind or have low vision).

..and are proud of its cultural and moral legacy. If by secularism is meant unbelief, there are few, if any, secularists in the Arab-Muslim world.

..find his or her way to a destination: piloting and path integration. Piloting means using sensory information to estimate one's position at any given time, while path..

They had a close encounter with a dromedary, a one-humped camel.

# ACTIVITY A

...peanuts develop underground. Unlike true nuts, peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*, also known as *pinders, goober peas, ground peas, and ground nuts*) are unusual

1

The primary dietary source of sodium is *sodium chloride*, also known as table salt, he says.

2

Malaria can be more severe in children, and symptoms in children are similar to those of other *diseases*.

3

If people could copy our software - in other words, create *cheap knockoffs* of our products - we wouldn't get paid for our work.

4

Talent can take years to surface. When Robert was a young boy, his great *aptitude* in physics was not all apparent to his teachers.

5

## 2. EXAMPLES

Examples can inform the reader about unknown words. They can illustrate the meaning of the word that they refer to.

Signals of examples in the text: for example, (e.g), for instance, such as, including, like, as an example, cases of, instances of, type of,

The Lehigh malware is an example of a computer virus.



Networks allow users to share high-tech gadgets such as ipads, tablets, etc.



Since she retired from her job, she has developed new avocations. For example, she enjoys internet , going to the cinema and gardening.



# 3. ANTONYMS AND CONTRAST

Antonyms are words that mean the opposite of other words. Antonyms can refer to the opposed idea of an unknown word in the sentence or paragraph.

Tip  
1

- Select the unknown word.
- Identify its the part of speech: is it a verb? A noun? An adjective? etc.
- Check if there is a synonym in the sentence that can provide the same meaning of the unkown word.
- Determine its positive or negative value: Is it a good or a bad thing?

..., the glass might absorb so much acoustic energy that it will **shatter**; the other glasses remain **unaffected**.

To keep healthy, people need to be **active**. If they remain **stagnant**, it could result in loss of vitality and health.

# 3. ANTONYMS AND CONTRAST

Tip  
2

- Use these signals to help you identify contrast or opposition phrases that may explain the unknown word.
- Bear in mind that the antonym may appear **before or after** these signals.

Signals of antonyms in the text: **however, but, yet, in contrast, although, on the other hand, despite, while, in spite of, even though, unlike, nevertheless.**

It kept me **dry and warm** **even though** I was **soaked**, and all of the moisture on my body passed right through.

The **big trees, lush vegetation, and wildlife** are **in stark contrast** to **withered** areas in the city, which...

## 4. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

Sometimes it is necessary to rely on your own experience and background knowledge to figure out the meaning of a word. Read all the words surrounding the unknown term to help you draw conclusions based on the complimentary information found in the text.

**What is the meaning of *abate*?**

...physicians usually allow football players to resume play once symptoms abate, perhaps within days.

For the sailors, the wind continued to abate and you could feel their frustration.

**What is the meaning of *surrogate*?**

A patient or his or her legal surrogate may also refuse the artificial administration of food and fluid through a feeding tube.

...machine that's going to land on the surface. And it is essentially a surrogate for a human geologist exploring Mars.

# 4. THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE

Chances are that you may know what word should go on the blank spaces solely on your knowledge or life experience. See if you can guess which word fits best with the context and write it down.

1

**What word best fits in the blank space?**

Michael Chamberlain was a pastor with the Seventh-day Adventist \_\_\_\_\_, a protestant denomination..

I believe in an America where the separation of \_\_\_\_\_ and state is absolute.

Dr. William Estes, an Old Catholic \_\_\_\_\_ bishop, put a finer point on this temptation:

2

**What word best fits in the blank space?**

...study did not break out the specific number of middle and high \_\_\_\_\_ teachers.

In each grade level at each \_\_\_\_\_ an intact classroom of students in a required course.

...results from this study may not generalize to youths who do not attend \_\_\_\_\_.

...in the yearbook and think, Who was she again? Did I go to \_\_\_\_\_ with her?

# MULTIPLE MEANING THROUGH CONTEXT

...coauthor and Harvard University psychologist Elizabeth Spelke argues that evolution has **endowed** people with " core knowledge " about several domains. 1

The microstructure of calcium carbonate **endows** the shell with an unexpected combination of properties. 2

Ph.D., Brenda Brodie is the only **Endowed Professor** of Special Education in Visual Impairment, School of Education... 3

professor, and. the holder of the Oscar S. Wyatt **Endowed Chair** in the department of mechanical engineering at Texas A &M; University... 4

The " krithians, " those lucky few born with fully **endowed blood** that complete command over the craft of magic, were protected... 5

Bill Cosby and his wife, Camille, recently gave \$3 million for **endowing** a chaired professorship in mental health... 6

Her awards include a grant from the National **Endowment** for the Arts. 7

# WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED:

- 1. We can decipher the meaning of unknown words by using context clues such as synonyms, examples, opposites, and our general knowledge.**
- 2. The context is the source of hints that will help you determine the meaning of an unknown word.**
- 3. We should not employ the dictionary every time we find an unknown word when reading. Instead, we should be able to propose or hypothesize the meaning of a word based on the context.**
- 4. At this point, the dictionary should only be used for verifying our conclusions or suppositions from our text analysis.**

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Langan, J. Ten steps to improving college reading. Fifth edition, Townsend Press, USA, 2008. 628 pp.

Singhal, M. Teaching Reading to adult second language learners. Theoretical Foundations, Pedagogical Applications, and Current Issues. The Reading Matrix Inc. USA, 2005. 249 pp.

Sonka, A. Skillful Reading. A text and Workbook for students of English as a second language. Prentice Hall Regents, New Jersey, USA, 1981. 278 pp.

English Grammar. Helping learners with real English. The Bank of English. The University of Birmingham. Harper Collins Publishers, England. 2000. 486 pp.

Davies, Mark. (2008-) *The Corpus of Contemporary American English: 450 million words, 1990-present*. Available online at <http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>.

All examples in this presentation were taken from the corpus above.