

Vocabulary

Vocabulary – all the words used or understood by a person

Context Clues – the information that surrounds a new word; it is used to understand its meaning

Synonym – a word that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another word

Antonym – a word that has the opposite meaning of another word

When reading, it is common to encounter words that are unfamiliar. Don't get discouraged if you don't know every word. This worksheet will show you ways to figure out new words, so that you won't need a dictionary every time.

Using Context Clues to Figure Out Unfamiliar Words

➤ Synonyms

Often an author will place a synonym near a new or difficult word as a context clue. Usually a synonym is set off with a pair of commas, a pair of dashes, or a pair of parentheses. Some words that signal synonyms are *or* and *that is*.

Example: Being **nocturnal**, that is, active at night, owls are rarely seen during the day.

Explanation: The signal words *that is* clue the reader that the synonym for nocturnal is *active at night*.

➤ Antonyms

An author may use an antonym to help you understand an unfamiliar word by showing you what the word is not. Sometimes an antonym can be found directly next to the unfamiliar word set off with a pair of commas, a pair of dashes, or a pair of parentheses. At other times, antonyms are placed in other parts of the sentence to emphasize the contrast between the ideas. Some words that signal synonyms are: *but, however, in contrast, instead, not, on the other hand, unlike, and yet*.

Example: Suzanne's tone was surprisingly **flippant** in contrast to her usual respectful manner.

Explanation: The signal words *in contrast* clue the reader that the antonym is respectful. Therefore, flippant means disrespectful or sassy.

➤ Examples

Often an author will show the meaning of a new or difficult word by providing an example. The following signal words indicate that an example is coming: *for instance, for example, such as, and including*.

Example: Some authors use **pseudonyms**; for example, famous American author Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Clemens.

Explanation: From the example the reader can conclude that a pseudonym is a pen (false) name, a name used by the writer to possibly keep anonymity.

➤ **General Context**

When a synonym, antonym, or example is not given, you must rely on the general context to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. This requires you to read the entire sentence, or to read ahead for a few sentences, for information that will help you understand the new word. The context may include vivid word pictures or descriptions of a situation. It may also require you to use logic or reasoning skills to figure out unfamiliar words.

Example: To ensure safety, written and road tests should be **mandatory** for everyone who seeks a driver's license for the first time; no exceptions should be allowed.

Explanation: The best meaning of the word is *required*. Clues from the sentence are the words *ensure* and *no exceptions should be allowed*.

Using Word Parts to Figure Out a New Word

Roots – the main or basic part of a word. Prefixes and suffixes are added to roots to make new words.

Prefix – a group of letters with a specific meaning added to the beginning of a word (root) to make a new word

Suffix – a group of letters with a specific meaning added to the end of a word (root) to make a new word

If you encounter an unfamiliar word, you can break it into parts. Then you can look for parts that you know. If you know a few common word parts, then you will be able to figure out many words.

Example: Create 2 words using the following word parts and define them.

| | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Prefix in- (not) | Root -vis- (see) | Suffix -ible (can be) |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|

1. visible – can be seen

2. invisible – not able to be seen

Explanation: When the word parts combine, they form words with different definitions.

Commonly Used Word Parts

| Word Part | Meaning | Examples |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Prefix | | |
| a- | on, in | ashore, atop |
| de- | from, remove, opposite of | derail, defrost |
| de- | down | descend |
| en-, em- | in, put into, cause to be | enrage, embattle |
| ex- | out of | exchange |
| il- | not | illegal |
| un- | not | uneasy |
| in-, im- | in, into | inject, implant |
| in- | not | incomplete |
| pre- | before | prepay |
| re- | again, back | retell, recall |
| sub- | under | subway |
| trans- | across | transport |
| Root | | |
| -don-, -dot-, -dow- | to give | donate, antidote |
| -fact- | make | factory |
| -fer- | to bring, to carry | transfer, offer |
| -mis-, -mit- | to send | transmit, mission |
| -mut- | change | mutant |
| -ped- | foot | pedal, pedestrian |
| -pot- | strength | potent |
| -rupt- | break | disrupt, erupt |
| -ven-, vent- | to come, to move toward | convene, circumvent |
| -vert- | turn | divert |
| -vid-, -vis- | see | video, vision |
| Suffix | | |
| -able, -ible | can be | washable, collectible |
| -al | like, suitable for, based on | magical, seasonal, fictional |
| -an, -ian, -or, -er | person who | American, politician, conductor, voter |
| -ful | full of | graceful |
| -fy, -ify | to make | beautify |
| -ia | condition | hysteria, insomnia |
| -ic | made of, made by | metallic, photographic |
| -ion, -tion, -ation | result of action, state of being | election, imagination |
| -less | without | colorless |
| -ness | state of being | darkness |
| -ous | having | famous |
| -some | making someone feel | lonesome |

Practice Exercises

Putting off your work will have **adverse** – negative – effects on your learning.

1. What does **adverse** mean?
 - a. helpful
 - b. harmful
 - c. long-term
 - d. short-term
2. Identify the context clue you used.
 - a. synonym
 - b. antonym
 - c. general context
 - d. example

Don't be slothful or lazy; be **diligent** in your work habits.

3. What does **diligent** mean?
 - a. hardworking
 - b. self-paced
 - c. respectful
 - d. idle
4. Identify the context clue you used.
 - a. synonym
 - b. antonym
 - c. general context
 - d. example

Parrots are **contrary** birds. They do only what they want to do. I know a family that tried for months to teach a parrot to talk. Over and over they repeated, "Good day." They smiled and cooed at the bird. They did everything they could to get it to speak. The parrot remained mute.

At last, their **frustration** got the best of them. They said to the parrot, "How idiotic you are!" It remained silent.

One night a famous person came to dinner. She became **enamored** with the parrot. She stroked its neck and said, "What a beautiful bird you are." The parrot took one look at the woman and replied, "How idiotic you are!"

5. The word **contrary** means
 - a. stubborn
 - b. cooperative
 - c. friendly
 - d. large
6. Identify the context clue you use for number 5.
 - a. synonym
 - b. antonym
 - c. general context
 - d. example
7. **Frustration** has two parts. The suffix is *-tion*. The root is *frustra*, which means "failure." **Frustration** means
 - a. success
 - b. the feeling that comes from success
 - c. failure
 - d. the feeling that comes from failure
8. **Enamored** has three parts. The prefix is *en-*. The suffix is *-ed*. The root is *amor*, which means "love." *Became enamored with* means
 - a. discovered the secret of.
 - b. was caused to love.
 - c. became disgusted with.
 - d. chatted with.
9. Which word from the first paragraph means "silent?"
 - a. cooed
 - b. talk
 - c. mute
 - d. speak