

# CONTEXT CLUES

*Objective: to be able to define a word by using a variety of context clues.*

In most cases you will not need to determine the meaning of an isolated word. A word will usually appear in a sentence or paragraph (called the *context*) which may offer clues to the word's meaning. There are a number of methods for discovering whether a word is being defined in the context of the sentence or paragraph.

## **STRATEGY ONE**

Sometimes the meaning of a word or special term may be signaled by punctuation marks, such as a comma, parentheses, dash, colon, or semicolon. In the following examples; the underlined word is defined in the sentence and signaled by a punctuation mark.

- Comma ,

*Example:* Buying a tractor is like buying a car; you can add on options, extra items, that will outfit your rig.

- Parentheses ( )

*Example:* The FMCSR (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations) states what you may drive, when you may drive, and how you may drive.

- Dash -

*Example:* You will read about coupling and uncoupling - how to hook the tractor and trailer together and how to unhook them.

- Colon :

*Example:* Make an effort to get along with your fellow workers: the dispatcher, safety supervisor, maintenance crew, and other drivers.

- Semicolon ;

*Example:* Good driving habits are essential for professionals; therefore, special training is required.

- Quotation marks " "

*Example:* The nickname "Jake Brake" has come to mean "engine retarder."

**PRACTICE 1 •**

Write the meaning of the underlined word in each sentence. Use the punctuation signals to help you determine the definition.

1. The war was fought with mercenaries (people hired to fight) more than with countrymen.

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2. Everyone showed apathy - a lack of interest - toward the problem.

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3. He is very fond of johnnycakes, small cakes made of cornmeal, for his breakfast.

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4. There are basically two kinds of anesthetics: drugs that simply numb an area of the body and drugs that make you completely unconscious.

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5. The adult education program has one standard curriculum; however, other topics for study can be brought in.

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## STRATEGY TWO

The following words can signal the definition (meaning) of a word or phrase.

- or

*Example:* Your gross **or** total weight must be within certain limits.

- that is, this is

*Example:* These gears are termed external gears; **that is**, the gear teeth are outside of the gear.

- is, are

*Example:* Leverage **is** the idea that a small amount of force can be used to move a heavy object.

- which names

*Example:* A log book **which names** the routes of a drive usually takes is required by the Department of Transportation.

- called

*Example:* Connecting two short trailers **called** tandem trailers is a common use of conventional tractors.

- which is, which are

*Example:* Power flow, **which is** the route the engine torque is relayed through the transmission, is based on the gear you have selected.

- which means

*Example:* As you can see, trucking is a regulatory industry, **which means** that there are rules and laws that dictate what can be carried, when, and by whom.

- who is

*Example:* Elizabeth Smith, **who is** the new general manager, will be inspecting the new terminal.

## PRACTICE 2 •

Write the meaning of the underlined word in each sentence. Use the word and phrase signals to help you determine the definition.

1. An octagon, or eight-sided figure, is the usual shape for a stop sign.

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2. Laws that cover staying on schedule in regard to how long you may drive without a break are called hours of service regulations.

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3. Oscillation, that is, the fluctuation of current within a circuit, is what the mechanic is looking for in the electrical system.

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4. Her quarterly statement, which means a listing of all her accounts for the past three months, is very helpful when she is doing her taxes.

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5. Some road signs are written in kilometers, which is a metric measurement of distance.

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6. Going down a steep hill requires downshifting, which means changing to a lower gear.

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## STRATEGY THREE

The meaning of a word is not always obvious. Sometimes a word can be understood best by explaining the opposite of the word. As in the previous examples, there are signal words to let you know the definition is actually the opposite of the unknown word. In the following examples the underlined words mean the opposite of each other.

- although

*Example:* **Although** it takes a long time to install exhaust valve seals, their removal can be done quickly.

- but

*Example:* They found contraband in his trailer, **but** he thought he was hauling legal cargo.

- even though

*Example:* He owns a conventional truck **even though** he prefers a cab-over-engine.

- however

*Example:* Hauling combustible cargo pays well; **however**, it is safer to carry nonflammable freight.

- on the other hand

*Example:* The sign indicated deceleration; **on the other hand**, he knew he would have to maintain his speed to make it up the hill.

- yet

*Example:* They called him a boll weevil, **yet** he had ten years of driving experience.

### PRACTICE 3 •

In each sentence, circle the word that signals the opposite meaning as given in the sentence. Then write the definition of the underlined word.

1. Paul was successful in completing 50 push-ups; however, Jim's efforts were futile.

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2. Even though the photographer hastily developed the film, he was too slow for the pictures to make the evening edition of the news.

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3. To others his manner was caustic, yet he always sounded very pleasant to her.

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4. Although she worked laboriously on the project, it had the appearance of being thrown together at the last minute.

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5. She was often referred to as being gregarious, but she was always welcome when I saw her.

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6. I want to retaliate for what my neighbor did to my lawn; on the other hand, the fighting has to stop sometime, so why not with me?

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## **STRATEGY FOUR**

Sometimes the meaning of a word cannot be found in the same sentence as the word. The definition may become clear by reading the paragraph in which the word appears.

- The meaning may be found in a previous sentence.

*Example:* Monsanto is a well-known manufacturer of mud flaps. National Rubber is another manufacturer of *anti-spray devices*.

Anti-spray devices are defined as mud flaps in the sentence previous to the one that contains the unknown term.

- The meaning may be found in a following sentence.

*Example:* The pistons of an engine react to the internal combustion of gasoline. This small explosion occurs many times each minute.

Combustion is defined as an explosion in the sentence that follows the one that contains the unknown term.

### **PRACTICE 4 •**

Write the meaning of the underlined word in each sentence. The definition may be found in the sentence before the one containing the underlined word or in the sentence after it.

1. The mechanic checked the reciprocating action of the pistons in the cylinder. He discovered that this back-and-forth movement was working properly.

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2. My car is worth less today than it was five years ago. It has depreciated in value.

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3. It was futile trying to explain it to him. It was pointless to keep talking to him about it.

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4. There was little continuity in the program. There should have been a progression and flow of activities.

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5. It was a bad situation. He was a real hindrance on the trip. He caused one difficulty after another.

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6. Carbon monoxide is a noxious gas. It can be extremely harmful to living things.

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## REVIEW

Write the meaning of the underlined word in the following sentences.

1. Their prattle, constant talking, was driving me wild.

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2. Downshifting – changing to a lower gear - saves wear on the brakes and helps prevent skidding when roads are slippery.

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3. His cavalier or unconcerned attitude was really a surprise to me.

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4. She could not decipher, that is, figure out, the secret code.

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5. Although the directions said the curtain rod was expandable, he found it to be completely rigid and unmoving.

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6. The union officials ratified the contract even though most of the workers did not agree with it or approve of it.

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7. He decided to pick up the papers himself. He simply had to expedite the situation. Consequently, the process was speeded up and made less difficult.

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8. It was a complex, difficult situation. Fortunately he was an excellent tactician. He could cleverly maneuver in any situation.

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