

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Figuring out or understanding the meaning of a word by looking at the surrounding words, sentences, and overall paragraph.

Instead of stopping to look up every unfamiliar word in a dictionary, a reader uses clues in the text to guess what the word means.

Common Types of Context Clues

- **Definition:** The writer directly defines the unfamiliar word right in the sentence.
- **Synonym:** A similar word or a direct restatement appears nearby to help explain the term.
- **Antonym / Contrast:** The text uses an opposite word or contrasting idea to show what the term is not.
- **Example:** The writer provides specific examples that illustrate the meaning of the word.
- **General Tone and Logic:** The wider situation or action described in the sentence hints at the word's meaning.

Clue Type	What it means	Example Sentence
1. Definition	The sentence tells you exactly what the word means.	"The businessman was affluent, meaning he was extremely wealthy."
2. Synonym	The sentence uses a simpler word that means the same thing.	"The room was completely vacant; it was totally empty."
3. Antonym	The sentence uses an opposite word to show contrast.	"Unlike his cheerful brother, Thabo was very morose."
4. Explanation	The situation or logic gives away the meaning.	"The rain was ceaseless, so we had to cancel our soccer match."

Why It Matters

- **Improves Reading Speed:** You do not have to constantly stop for a dictionary.
- **Boosts Retention:** Connecting words to a real story or paragraph helps your brain remember them better.
- **Handles Multiple Meanings:** Many words change definitions based on how they are used in a specific sentence

Time to practise

1. The boy was exhausted after running five kilometres.

If you don't know the word *exhausted*, can you work out its meaning?

2. Lerato was famished. She had not eaten anything since breakfast and immediately ordered two meals.

- What does famished mean?

- Clues:

- had not eaten

- ordered two meals

- Answer:

- Very hungry.

3. Unlike her generous sister, Naledi never wanted to share anything with others.

"Unlike" signals a contrast.

Generous = willing to give/share.

4. The road was treacherous. It was covered in ice and several cars had already crashed.

Treacherous = dangerous.

5. The teacher told the learners to stop making a **commotion**, as the loud noise was disturbing the class next door.

What does **commotion** mean?

The sentence mentions '*loud noise*' and '*disturbing the class*'.

If a loud noise is disturbing people, a commotion must mean a disturbance, a racket, or a loud fuss!

6. Sipho is usually very **timid**, but today he was brave enough to give a speech.

Look at the word '*but*'. That tells us an opposite is coming.

The opposite of '*brave*' is shy or scared.

Therefore, **timid** means shy or lacking confidence."

7. The smell of the rotting garbage was **obnoxious**; it made everyone cover their noses.

People covered their noses because of a rotting smell, so **obnoxious** means extremely unpleasant or nasty.

8. Instead of keeping the old, **decrepit** cars, the taxi owner replaced them with brand new models.

The owner replaced them with '*brand new*' models, which means **decrepit** means old, ruined, or worn out.

Remember:

- **Always look before and after** an unfamiliar word.
- Search for **definitions, synonyms, antonyms, or explanations**.
- Use the **overall logic** of the sentence to make an educated guess.
- Next time you write a comprehension test, don't panic when you see a hard word.
- Put on your detective hat and look for the context clues.

ACTIVITY: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Sometimes you do not need a dictionary to understand a difficult word.

Look at the words around it for clues.

Read each sentence and choose the meaning of the bold word.

1. After running the marathon, Sipho was **exhausted**. He could hardly keep his eyes open.

Exhausted means:

- A. excited
- B. extremely tired
- C. angry
- D. hungry

2. The road was **treacherous**. It was covered with ice, and several vehicles had already crashed.

Treacherous means:

- A. safe
- B. beautiful
- C. dangerous
- D. crowded

3. Lerato was **reluctant** to speak in front of the class. She kept looking at the floor and refused to volunteer.

Reluctant means:

- A. unwilling
- B. excited
- C. confident
- D. prepared

4. The little boy was **famished**. He had not eaten since breakfast and immediately asked for two sandwiches.

Famished means:

- A. very thirsty
- B. very angry
- C. very hungry
- D. very tired

5. Unlike his **generous** brother, Kabelo refused to share his food with anyone.

Generous means:

- A. willing to give or share
- B. unwilling to work
- C. easily frightened
- D. very wealthy

Memorandum:

ACTIVITY: WORDS IN CONTEXT

- 1. B – extremely tired
- 2. C – dangerous
- 3. A – unwilling
- 4. C – very hungry
- 5. A – willing to give or share