

Understanding Vocabulary from Context

The **context of a word** is its **environment or the words which surround it**. By looking closely at these surrounding words, you can pick up hints or clues which will help you with the meaning of a difficult word. Research has shown that most good readers use context clues regularly. It has also been shown that these readers are generally aware of the different types of context clues. Knowing something about these different types can help sharpen your word attack skills and improve your overall reading ability.

Types of Context Clues

1. Clues supplied through **synonyms** (words with similar meanings):

We tried to calm the crying baby, but nothing we did seemed to pacify her.

2. Clues supplied through **antonyms** (words with opposite meanings):

The shirt on the hanger was pristine, but the shirt on the bed was worn and dirty.

3. Clues contained in **comparisons and contrasts**:

As the trial continued, the defendant's guilt became more and more obvious. With even the slightest bit of new evidence against him, there would be no chance of acquittal.

4. Clues contained in a **definition or description**:

Paul is a transcriptionist, a person who makes a written copy of a recorded message.

5. Clues through **association** with other words in the sentence:

Brian is considered the most troublesome student ever to have walked the halls of Central High School. He has not passed a single class in his four years there and seldom makes it through an entire hour of class without falling asleep or getting sent to the office. After trying to help Brian but never succeeding, his teachers consider him completely incorrigible.

6. Clues which appear in a **series**:

The fiddle, banjo, and dulcimer are all popular among the Appalachian Mountain people.

7. Clues provided by the **tone and setting**:

The streets filled instantly with bellicose protesters, who pushed and shoved their way through the frantic bystanders. The scene was no longer peaceful and calm as the marchers had promised it would be.

8. Clues derived from **Greek and Latin** words :

We visited a small Italian town on the day that residents celebrated the town's tricentennial.

NOW, try finding the Greek and Latin roots of all the underlined words above.

(adapted for Mr. Schoch's ELA class from Sebranek, P., Meyer, V. *Basic English Revisited: A Student Handbook*)