

## Guessing Vocabulary in Context

There are many ways to help you guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context. Read the explanation below and study the examples.

### 1. Definition

A definition gives the meaning of a word. The writer may use words, phrases, or statements to define something. The writer uses key words, or signal words to identify a definition, so the reader needs to look for them. See examples of key words below:

#### Key words

is/are	means/mean
is/are called	what this means is
is/are known as	consist of
is/are defined as	refer to
is/are described as	may be seen as

**e.g.**

Inflation means a rise in the general level of prices you pay for things you buy.

an unfamiliar word = *inflation*

signal word = *means*

the definition = *a rise in the general level of prices you pay for everything you buy.*

### 2. Restatement

The writer may use other words, phrases, or sentences to provide the meaning of a difficult word. It is called “restatement”; the writer repeats the word again or describes it in a different way.

Signal words for restatement are below:

#### Key words

or  
that is to say  
in other words  
i.e. or that is

**e.g.**

The surface of Africa consists mainly of plateaus, or large flat areas, although these occur at different levels.

an unfamiliar word = *plateaus*

signal word = *or*

meaning = *large flat areas*

### 3. Punctuation marks

Punctuation is used to describe the meaning of an unfamiliar word. The writer writes unfamiliar words and then uses punctuation with words, phrases, or sentences to explain the meaning of the new words. Such punctuation is below:

#### Key words

, commas  
, , appositive  
( ) parentheses  
- - dashes  
; semicolon  
: colon

e.g.

The use of computers to handle text, or word processing, was foreseen in the 1950s.

an unfamiliar word = *handle text*

signal punctuation = , ,

meaning: handle text = *word processing*

## 4. Examples

Examples help the reader to understand the meaning of new words without definition. See key words or signal words used for showing examples below:

### Key words

such as

like

for example, ...

for instance, ...

is / are

e.g.

Use navigation buttons, such as, the “Next” button, the “Previous” button, the “Menu” button, and the “Exit” button, to go back and forth or jump to other topics while you are using your English software.

unfamiliar words = *navigation buttons*

signal word = *such as*

meaning = *buttons on computer program that are used for turning on pages*

## 5. Contrast

The reader can guess the meaning of new words by using signal words of contrast. These indicate the opposite meaning of the new words. See key words or signal words of contrast below:

### Key words

but / instead of / even though / in contrast to

yet / in spite of / although / as opposed to

unlike / despite / however / on the other hand

whereas / while / still / provided that

e.g.

Although Dara and Vipa are very close friends, they are very different. Dara spends a lot of money to buy things **while** Vipa loves to economize.

a) spend more money

b) save money

c) buy more things than before

d) keep things in a safe place

## 6. Similarity

The reader can guess the meaning of new words by using signal words of similarity. These refer to the words or phrases mentioned formerly. See key words or signal words of similarity below:

### Key words

like / similarly / in the same way

as / the same as / just as

e.g.

Indonesia is producing Ford cars and trucks. Soon, Thailand and Vietnam will be producing **the same** products with, no doubt, the same quality.

What does the phrase “the same products” mean? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your clue? \_\_\_\_\_

## Exercises

First, study the example and then continue with the exercises below.

### Sample sentence:

The snake **slithered** through the grass. It was hunting.

You must discover what **slithered** means by using logic. Here are your choices, and the analysis:

- a) stopped moving  
INCORRECT: the sentence above says THROUGH the grass. “Through” means there is some movement.
- b) slept in the grass  
INCORRECT: the sentence above says it was hunting. Snakes don't sleep when they hunt.
- c) ate something  
INCORRECT: the sentence above says it was hunting. Snakes don't eat when they are hunting. They eat AFTER they hunt.
- d) moved or traveled  
CORRECT ANSWER: the sentence above says THROUGH the grass. “Through” means that there is some movement.

Now, **READ** each sentence and **CHOOSE** the correct answer.

1. The tiger's **roar** could be heard in villages far away.

What does **roar** probably mean?

- A) food a tiger eats
- B) a tiger's dream
- B) a tiger's ear
- C) a sound a tiger makes

2. The thought of eating a rat is **abhorrent** to most people.

What does **abhorrent** probably mean?

- A) fun, lively
- B) horrible, repugnant
- B) delicious, tasty
- C) sweet, sugary

3. My **absent-minded** teacher loses his keys, his book and his chalk almost every day!

What does it mean to be **absent-minded**?

- A) be hateful
- B) not pay attention
- C) be intelligent
- D) not like someone

4. You can trust the salesmen at that store because they always conduct business in an **aboveboard** manner.

What does **aboveboard** probably mean?

- A) honest, open
- B) sneaky, dishonest
- C) horrible, repugnant
- D) strange, unusual

5. Petra has so many friends because she is a **gregarious** person.

What does **gregarious** probably mean?

- A) introverted, self-contained
- B) shy, quiet
- C) friendly, outgoing
- D) rude, hostile

6. The lovely **egret** is in danger of extinction because clothing manufacturers use their long, beautiful tail feathers to make ladies' hats.

What is an **egret**?

- A) a small child
- B) a type of food
- C) a sound a tiger makes
- D) a type of bird

7. I can't believe it! Right in the middle of our conversation, Peter turned around **abruptly** and walked out of the room!

What does **abruptly** probably mean?

- A) formally
- B) slowly, in no hurry
- C) suddenly, without notice
- D) quietly, in an unusual manner

8. After the harvest, we had an **abundant** amount of apples. We made apple pie, apple sauce, and apple juice because we had so many apples!

What does **abundant** probably mean?

- A) a shortage
- B) not enough
- C) very red
- D) plentiful

9. When Sara was sick, her voice was almost **inaudible**. We couldn't hear what she was trying to say clearly.

What does **inaudible** probably mean?

- A) very loud, easy to hear
- B) very soft, hard to hear
- C) very strange, uncommon
- D) very shy, introverted

10. The hill was too **arduous** for us to climb. We had to walk our bicycles up the hill.

What does **arduous** probably mean?

- A) tall, soft
- B) fun, exciting
- C) easy, not challenging
- D) difficult, steep

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**Answer Key**

**Exercises**

1. D 2. B 3. B 4. A 5. C 6. D 7. C 8. D 9. B 10. D