

Boost Free Lessons - Year 7 English

Lesson 2: Contextual Clues for Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Worked Example 1

Work out the meaning of the word in bold.

*The path was so **arduous** that we stopped three times to rest before we reached the top.*

1. Do not panic at an unfamiliar word. Read the whole sentence first.
2. Look for clues around it. Here the walkers stopped three times to rest, and they were climbing.
3. That tells you the path demanded a great deal of effort.
4. Test your guess by putting your own word back into the sentence and checking it still makes sense.

Arduous means difficult and tiring.

Worked Example 2

Work out the meaning of the word in bold.

*Unlike his **gregarious** sister, who knew everyone at the party, Ben stood alone by the window.*

1. The word **Unlike** signals a contrast, so the sister is the opposite of Ben.
2. Ben stands alone, so his sister must be the opposite of that.
3. She knew everyone at the party, which tells you she enjoys company.
4. A contrast clue works by telling you what a word is **not**.

Gregarious means sociable and fond of company.

Remember: Never skip a word you do not know. Read around it and look for a definition, a contrast, an example, or the general sense of the sentence, then test your guess by swapping your own word in.



Question 1: Work out the meaning of each word in bold.

1. The soup was **tepid**, so I put it back in the microwave to warm it up.

2. She spoke in a **meek** voice, barely louder than a whisper.

3. The instructions were so **ambiguous** that half the class built the model incorrectly.

4. After a week of rain, the ground was **saturated** and could hold no more water.

5. He gave a **candid** answer, telling the truth even though it embarrassed him.

6. The room was **immaculate**, without a single speck of dust anywhere.

7. Her **audacious** plan was far bolder than anything the team had tried before.

8. The crowd grew **restless**, shifting and muttering as the delay went on.



Question 2: Read the passage below, then answer the questions.

The river **meandered** slowly through a **vast** plain that stretched further than the eye could see. Trees were **sparse** here, nothing like the thick forest behind us, and the earth was **parched** after months without rain.

1. What does **meandered** mean, and which words helped you decide?

2. What does **vast** mean? Find the clue in the sentence.

3. What does **sparse** mean? The contrast with the forest is your clue.

4. What does **parched** mean, and what caused it?

5. Which single word in the passage tells you the land was very dry?

6. Choose one bolded word and write your own sentence using it correctly.



Question 3: Answer the following questions.

1. Write a sentence using a difficult word, with a clue that helps a reader work out its meaning.

2. Name three different kinds of clue a writer can give about a word's meaning.

3. Why is guessing from context more useful in an exam than looking a word up?

4. A word has clues pointing to two different meanings. What should you do next?

5. Explain how the word **although** can be a clue to a word's meaning.





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Answers: Contextual Clues for Unfamiliar Vocabulary**Question 1**

1. Slightly warm, or lukewarm.
2. Quiet, gentle and submissive.
3. Unclear, and able to be understood in more than one way.
4. Completely soaked, and unable to absorb any more.
5. Honest and open, even when it is uncomfortable.
6. Perfectly clean and spotless.
7. Bold and daring.
8. Unable to keep still or stay patient.

Question 2

1. Wandered slowly along a winding path. The clues are the river and the words **slowly** and **through**.
2. Extremely large. The clue is that the plain stretched further than the eye could see.
3. Thinly scattered. The contrast with the thick forest shows there were very few trees.
4. Extremely dry, caused by months without rain.
5. **Parched**.
6. Model response: The river meandered between the hills instead of running straight.

Question 3

1. Model response: The old bridge looked precarious, swaying whenever the wind picked up.
2. A definition given in the sentence, a contrast such as **unlike** or **although**, an example, or the general sense of the whole passage.
3. You will not have a dictionary in an exam, and working it out is faster than stopping to look it up.
4. Read the sentences before and after it, since the wider passage usually settles which meaning fits.
5. It signals a contrast, so the word probably means the opposite of what follows it.

