

# Using Context Clues



In this lesson you will:



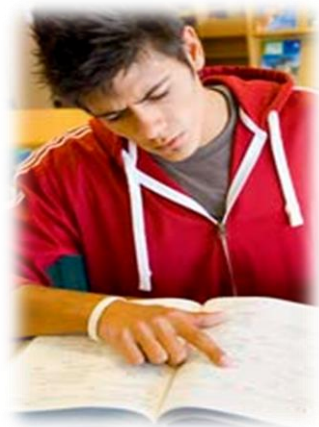
- know different types of contextual clues and strategies on using the clues
- use context clues to guess unknown words



## Introduction:

You will not understand every word you read. Often you will have to guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word using both your knowledge of English and your knowledge of the world. Therefore, when you meet an unknown word, do not stop reading to look up the word in the dictionary just yet. Reread the sentence(s) or read a little further and you may find **some words or phrases in the context to help you understand the**

When you read, you may see a word you don't know. Be a word detective. Look around and see if you can find other words that might help you. Use those words as clues to learn the word you don't know.



**meaning of the word you do not know.** These words or phrases are referred to as **context clues**. Let's see some examples of context clues.

If you do catch a computer virus, there are several antivirus programs to detect and **eradicate** the virus.

(From the context, you know that antivirus programs are used to detect and remove viruses from a computer system. So you can figure out that '**eradicate**' means 'remove'.)

For many people today, it's difficult to imagine life without a cellular phone. Once the preserve of the rich, they have now become an **indispensable** part of modern day life.

(From the context, you can figure out that '**indispensable**' means 'important / essential'.)

To approach the meaning of the new vocabulary, searching from the context is your first task. *If you become more aware of the words around the difficult words you encounter in your reading, you will save yourself many trips to the dictionary.* This lesson presents a summary of ways in which the context or reading can give clues to the meaning of new vocabulary items.

## Types of Context Clues

There are four types of context clues to look for:

- (1) Definition      (2) Restatement  
(3) Example        (4) Contrast

**1. Definition Clues:** Many times a writer defines a word immediately following its use. The writer may directly **define a word by giving a brief definition or a synonym** (a word that has the same meaning). The clues are:

means	is/are	is/are called
is/are known as	is/are/can be defined as	refers to
comma (,)	dash (-)	parentheses ( )

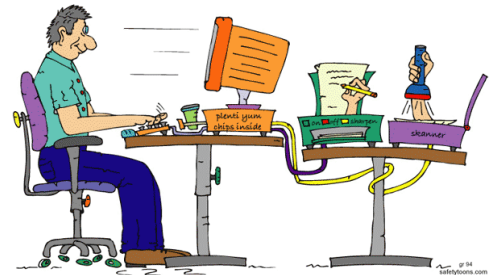
## Examples:

Unknown word      Signal

Definition

**Computer** means a device that processes data according to a set of instructions known as a program.

- A **microchip** can be defined as a tiny piece of silicon or similar material carrying an integrated circuit.
- **Peripherals** are known as the devices attached to a computer.
- A special set of programs which is called an **operating system** provides an interface for the user and allows applications programs to communicate with the hardware.
- **Turnkey systems**, complete hardware/software products which are ready for use, are available from many suppliers.
- **Speech synthesis** – the process of enabling machines to talk to people – is much easier than speech the sentence.
- The key to successful system development is through systems analysis and design to understand what the business requires from the information system. **Systems analysis** means understanding and specifying in detail what the information system should do. **System design** means specifying in detail how the many components of information system should be physically implemented. This text is about system analysis and design techniques used by a **systems analyst** (a business professional who develops information systems).



**2. Restatement Clues:** A writer may explain a word by using different words to say the same thing. The signal words are:

or	in other words	that is to say	that is (i.e.)
to put in another way	comma (,)	parentheses ( )	dash (-)

**Examples:**

Unknown word                      Signal                      Restatement

Computers are **multi-purpose tools**. In other words, they can be used in a wide variety of situations and are found in a wide range of systems.

- Not all computer systems are **compatible** i.e. they cannot be used with the same programs and data.  
(compatible = can be used together)

- Internet Relay Chat allows users to communicate using text messages in **real-time**, that is, without any delay, while the users are logged on to the system.  
(real-time = without any delay)



- If you use a **shared PC** or a PC that has public access, such as one in a college PC lab or library, be very careful about putting floppies into the PC's drives without a write-protect tab.  
(shared PC = \_\_\_\_\_)

**3. Example Clues:** Writers often include examples that help to explain or clarify a word. Some signal words are:

for example (e.g.)	for instance	with	like
such as	especially	including	namely

**Examples:**

Unknown word                      Signal                      Examples

Office workers use many **computer applications**, such as word processing, spreadsheets, and database.

- An MP3 file can provide information about itself in a coded block called a **tag** *including* the performer's name, a graphic such as an album cover, the song's lyrics, the musical genre, and a URL for more details.  
(tag = information about an MP3)

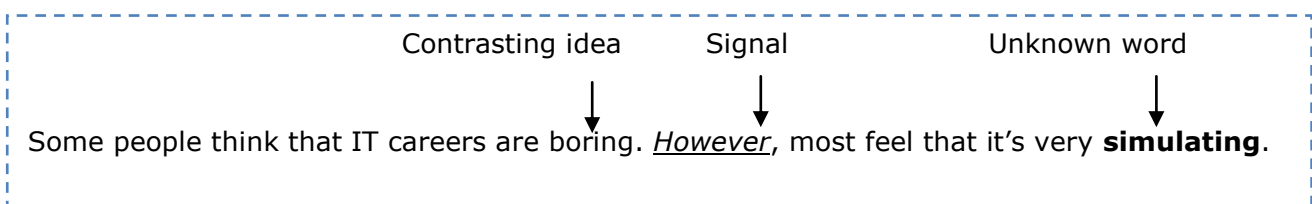


- Windows Vista contains hundreds of new **features** *including* updated graphical user interface named 'Windows Aero', improved searching features, and new multimedia creation tools.  
(features = something interesting)
- Smart cards store **vital** information *like* health records, driver's licenses, bank balances, and so on.  
(vital = \_\_\_\_\_)

**4. Contrast Clues:** In some sentences you will find two words with opposite meanings. If you know the meaning of one word, you will be able to guess the meaning of the other word. The words and expressions that indicate contrast are:

but	however	yet	although
though	even though	on the other hand	on the contrary
while/as			

**Examples:**



- Although* the payload might do something harmless such as displaying a message on the monitor screen, it might do something more **destructive** such as deleting files on the hard disk.  
(destructive = causing damage)
- While this software has a lot of advantages such as cost and application, it has a few **drawbacks** which need to be improved for better performance.  
(drawbacks = \_\_\_\_\_)

## Practice-1

## Using Context Clues Practice

**Instructions:** Read each sentence and write the definition or meaning for each bold word. Use the context clues you have learned about to find the definition of the word. Write your answer in the space provided and also explain the signal clues.

1. In **Information Technology** - the study and practice of techniques or use of equipment for dealing with information- the hardware such as computers, phones, and consumer electronics, is covering.

**Information Technology**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Voice and language recognition**, computer programs changing speech into program commands and digital, will provide an easy interface, avoiding the problem of **technophobic users**, or users who have a fear or strong dislike of technology and technological devices.

**Voice and language recognition**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Technophobic users**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. Changes in work practices may lead to **teleworking**. To put in another way, you can work at home while communicating with your office by computers, telephone, and fax.

**Teleworking**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Cyberspace** is the combination of all the data on all the computer networks throughout the world, accessed using the Internet. A person who uses their skills to make cyberspace safer is referred to as a **white hat hacker**.

**Cyberspace****Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_**White hat hacker****Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

5. A **computer virus** is a program that can reproduce itself and is written with the purpose of causing damage or causing a computer to behave in an unusual way. It **infects** other programs i.e. it attaches itself to other programs, known as host programs, and therefore reproduces itself.

**Computer virus****Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_**Infects****Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

6. Unix is a popular **multi-user** ( can be used by many people at the same time) and **multi-tasking** ( can run more than one program at a time) operating system originally designed for mainframe computers

**Multi-user****Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_**Multi-tasking****Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

7. The software consists of the **protocols**, i.e. the rules which determine the formats by which information may be exchanged between different systems.

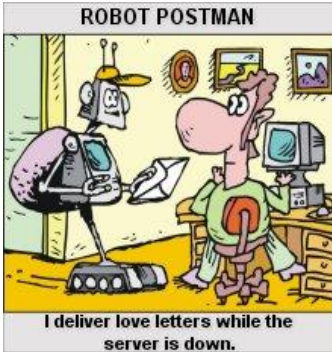
**Protocols****Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Practice -2

## Using Context Clues Practice

**Instructions:** Read the following passage and use context clues to figure out the meaning of each **BOLDFACED** word.

### Robots and androids



Engineers are trying to make computers think and behave like humans. By combining **Artificial Intelligence** (an area of studies concerned with making computer copy intelligent human behavior) and engineering techniques, they're building different types of robots and androids.

**Robots** are devices which are controlled by computers and move and react to sensory input. They usually contain software that runs automatically without the **intervention** or the involvement of a person. Today, they are used in all sorts of places, from factories to space exploration. Our life is affected by **robotics**, the science of designing and operating robots, in many other ways. Just think about **medicine** and the health system. For instance, **tiny computers** are used to monitor the heart rate and the blood pressure which are in the small areas that doctors cannot access themselves. In addition, micro-machines and insect-sized robots help doctors from simple treatments like heart operations to other **complicated** ones. Robots are also used in dangerous situations- for example in repairing nuclear plants, cleaning toxic wastes and **defusing** bombs.

Some research centers are building **androids** – robots that have shape and capabilities of a human being. In the near future, androids will be available for sale. They will have access to the Internet, guide the blind and assist elderly people at home; they will be a 24 hour security guard for your home, sound the alarm in case of fire and phone the police if there is a **burglary**. In short, androids will become intelligent, which makes our future's life more convenient.

*Source: Infotech English for Computer Users (Workbook)*

1. **Word:** **Artificial Intelligence**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Word:** **robot**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Word:**            **intervention**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Word:**            **robotics**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

5. **Word:**            **medicine**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

6. **Word:**            **tiny computers**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

7. **Word:**            **complicated**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

8. **Word:**            **defusing**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

9. **Word:**            **androids**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Word:**           **burglary**

**Definition:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Clue:** \_\_\_\_\_