

Using Context Clues

Introduction You can use **context clues** to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. The chart below gives examples of different types of context clues.

Type of Clue	Example
Definition	Superfoods, or natural foods that may prevent disease, have become popular.
Cause/Effect	Some superfoods, such as blueberries and red beans, contain antioxidants. These can help remove harmful substances from the human body.
Comparison	Some experts look dubiously on claims about superfoods, but other experts believe strongly that these foods can improve health.

Context clues can also help you figure out words with more than one meaning. For example, the table below has two sentences with the word **source**. What does **source** mean in each sentence? You can use the underlined context clues to figure out which meaning of **source** is being used.

Sentence	Context Clues	Definition
Choosing high-sugar drinks can be a source of health problems.	A problem has a cause. Therefore, the source of a problem is its cause.	the cause of something
The website MyPlate.gov is a source for facts about food choices.	A website can have information such as facts. Therefore, a source is something that gives information.	something that gives information

The sentences before and after the sentence with an unfamiliar word can also hold context clues.

Guided Practice

Determine the meanings of **fleeting**, **empirical**, and **panacea**. Then underline the words or phrases that helped you determine their meaning.

HINT The phrases as a result of, because of, and thanks to all signal cause-and-effect relationships. Words such as but, too, also, and as well as all indicate comparisons.

Some fads are **fleeting**, but more than a few people feel that superfoods are here to stay. The idea of superfoods isn't new, but the amount of **empirical** information we have about them is. Scientific observations and tests offer some evidence that certain foods can help people stay healthy. Nobody claims that these foods are a **panacea**—nothing can guarantee perfect health or cure every disease—but they can be part of a sensible diet.

Independent Practice

For numbers 1 and 2, read the paragraph. Then answer the questions.

For centuries, people in coastal areas of China and Japan have harvested a superfood found in marine environments. Recent studies show that eating seaweed protects against infection. It also might reduce the risk of serious diseases and extend peoples' life spans. If true, these would be important benefits.

1 What does the word marine mean in this paragraph?

- A very nutritious
- B dark blue in color
- C having to do with the ocean
- D member of the armed forces

2 Which two words from the paragraph help you understand the meaning of marine?

- A "China" and "Japan"
- B "coastal" and "seaweed"
- C "centuries" and "people"
- D "superfood" and "studies"

For numbers 3 and 4, read the paragraph. Then answer the questions.

Closer to home, you can find superfoods right in your garden or local store. Think "crisp and crunchy." Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and kale detoxify harmful substances. As a result, they may help to prevent some forms of cancer. These veggies also are low in calories and have lots of vitamins A, C, and K.

3 What does the word detoxify mean in this paragraph?

- A to move in a wide circle
- B to chew food slowly
- C to make a difficult decision
- D to remove bad effects

4 Which two words from the paragraph help you understand the meaning of detoxify?

- A "crisp" and "crunchy"
- B "prevent" and "cancer"
- C "veggies" and "substances"
- D "calories" and "vitamins"

Prepositions and Prepositional Phrases

Hint: A preposition is a word that shows how other words in a sentence are related. Words such as *about*, *by*, *in*, *of*, *on*, *to*, and *under* are prepositions.

- A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and ends with a noun or a pronoun. The noun or pronoun is called the **object** of the preposition.

The Emperor penguins [of] [Antarctica] spend winter [on] the open [ice.]

preposition object

- A preposition tells about the relationship between the object of the preposition and another word in the sentence. Look at these sentences.

Emperor penguins swim under the ice when they hunt.

I recently saw a movie about these amazing penguins.

- In the first sentence, the preposition *under* tells about the relationship between *ice* and the verb *swim*. In the second sentence, the preposition *about* tells about the relationship between *penguins* and the noun *movie*.
- A prepositional phrase sometimes tells *how*, *when*, *where*, or *what kind*. In the sentences you just read, the prepositional phrase *under the ice* tells *where* the penguins swim. The prepositional phrase *about these amazing penguins* tells *what kind* of movie it was.

Guided Practice

Underline the prepositional phrase in each sentence and circle the preposition. Then draw an arrow from the object of the preposition to the word it relates to.

- Emperor penguins breed in the winter.
- Female Emperor penguins lay eggs on the ice.
- Males watch the eggs while the females travel to the sea.
- The warmth of the males' feathers protects the eggs.
- The females return and provide food for the little chicks.

HINT Most prepositional phrases come after the noun or verb they describe.

Example:
I read a book about Emperor penguins.

Independent Practice

For numbers 1–3, choose the prepositional phrase in each sentence.

- Emperor penguins can be found on only one continent.
 - found on only one continent
 - can be found
 - only one continent
 - on only one continent
- Antarctica's winter begins in late March.
 - winter begins
 - begins in
 - in late March
 - begins in late March

3 There are 17 types of penguins, and the Emperor penguin is the largest.

- of penguins
- and the Emperor penguin
- is the largest
- are 17 types of

For numbers 4 and 5, answer the question.

4 Read this sentence.

Most animals move to a warmer place each winter, but Emperor penguins do not.

What is the purpose of the underlined preposition?

- to describe when animals move
- to connect warmer with animals
- to connect two phrases about winter
- to show a relationship between move and place

5 Read this sentence.

The feathers of the penguin keep out cold air and water.

What is the purpose of the underlined preposition?

- to connect feathers with cold
- to show a relationship between feathers and penguin
- to tell what a penguin's feathers do
- to show a relationship between penguin and cold

Homographs

Homographs are words that have the same spelling but different meanings. Sometimes homographs have different pronunciations from one another.

- The word *wind* is a homograph.
- A brisk wind blew, so I buttoned my coat. Then I began to *wind* my way down the hill to the village.
- You can use a dictionary to check the meaning and pronunciation of homographs. Each homograph is a separate entry in the dictionary.

Each homograph has a raised number after the entry word.

*wind*¹ (wind) *n.* 1. moving air
2. breath, or breathing

*wind*² (wind) *v.* 1. to go along a twisty path
2. to wrap something around another object

The homograph's pronunciation is in parentheses after the entry word.

- To find the right meaning of a homograph, read the definitions for each entry. Then see which meaning makes sense in the sentence you are reading.

Guided Practice

Read the passage. Find each underlined homograph in a dictionary. With a partner, figure out how to pronounce it. Then write a short definition above each word.

The village was a perfect place to loaf for a few hours. I bought a fresh loaf of bread at a bakery near the beach. A dove was eating crumbs on the sidewalk. Across the street, a sea gull dove for food as I watched. Then I bought a present for my mom at a store. I planned to present it to her tonight at dinner. An old wound in my leg began to ache. So, I wound my way slowly along the streets.

HINT Homographs are spelled the same but are not necessarily pronounced the same.

Independent Practice

For numbers 1–5, choose the correct meaning of the underlined word as it is used in the sentence.

- I wandered down to the port to watch cargoes being unloaded from boats.
 - port**¹ (pòrt) *n.* a harbor
 - port**² (pòrt) *n.* the left on a ship
 - port**³ (pòrt) *n.* a valve, or opening that lets liquid out
 - port**⁴ (pòrt) *n.* a person's manner, or bearing
- "Your ship looks sound," I said to a fisherman.
 - sound**¹ (saund) *n.* a noise
 - sound**² (saund) *adj.* in good shape
 - sound**³ (saund) *n.* a long, wide body of water
 - sound**⁴ (saund) *v.* to measure how deep water is
- "It has to be," he said. "Tomorrow we'll bound for the fishing lanes."
 - bound**¹ (baund) *v.* to leap or jump forward
 - bound**² (baund) *n.* border
 - bound**³ (baund) *adj.* tied
 - bound**⁴ (baund) *adj.* on the way to a particular place
- "High winds and fierce storms are sure to batter us on the open seas," he continued.
 - batter**¹ ('batə) *v.* to hit; pound
 - batter**² ('batə) *n.* a player at bat
 - batter**³ ('batə) *n.* a liquid mixture, often of flour, eggs, and milk
 - batter**⁴ ('batə) *n.* a sloping structure
- "Fortunately, our bow is sturdy and true," he finished.
 - bow**¹ (bou) *v.* to bend the head or upper body in greeting
 - bow**² (bou) *v.* to be pushed over with age or pressure
 - bow**³ (bou) *n.* the front of a ship's hull
 - bow**⁴ (bo) *n.* a weapon for shooting arrows