Using Context Clues

Name: _____	Date: _____	Score: _____ / 10

Quick Review

When you meet an unfamiliar word, slow down and read the words AROUND it. Writers often plant clues: a **definition** right after the word, a **synonym** joined by *or*, an **antonym** signaled by *unlike* or *but*, **examples** introduced by *such as*, or a **general situation** that points to the meaning. Match the clue type to the answer that fits BOTH the clue and the sentence as a whole.

PRACTICE

Read each sentence carefully. Use the context clue to choose the answer that best fits the meaning of the bold word.

1. Read the sentence: *The detective was **meticulous**, examining every fiber on the carpet and labeling each photograph before leaving the room.*
The word **meticulous** most likely means —

A. quick and casual in his work.

B. easily distracted by small details.

C. extremely careful and precise about details.

D. uninterested in finishing the job.

2. Read the sentence: *Unlike his usual **verbose** explanations, Coach Avery's halftime speech was just three short sentences.*
The word **verbose** most likely means —

A. using far more words than necessary.

B. delivered in a strong, angry tone.

C. easy for the team to remember.

D. spoken in a foreign language.

3. Read the sentence: *Many marsupials — pouched mammals such as kangaroos, koalas, and opossums — carry their young in **abdominal** pouches on the front of the body.*
The word **abdominal** most likely means —

A. located on the back near the spine.

B. made from soft fur and skin.

C. used only by very young animals.

D. located on the belly or front of the body.

4. Read the sentence: *Marisol showed remarkable **tenacity**, or persistence, finishing the science fair project even after two of her models collapsed.*
The word **tenacity** most likely means —

A. skill at building physical models.

B. the quality of refusing to give up.

C. willingness to ask for help from others.

D. fear of being judged by the judges.

5. Read the sentence: *The lighthouse stood **conspicuous** against the gray cliffs, its red and white stripes visible to ships miles out at sea.*
The word **conspicuous** most likely means —

A. weather-worn from years of storms.

B. perched on a dangerously high cliff.

C. easy to notice; standing out clearly.

D. shorter than the cliffs around it.

6. Read the sentence: *The new principal urged students to **abstain** from sugary drinks during the school day; she asked them to choose water instead.*
The word **abstain** most likely means —

A. to choose to hold back from doing something.

B. to complain loudly about a rule.

C. to drink something quickly without tasting it.

D. to share a drink with another person.

7. Read the sentence: *The senator was praised for her **candor**: she answered every question honestly, even when the truth was uncomfortable.*
The word **candor** most likely means —

A. the ability to win an argument easily.

B. open and honest expression.

C. kindness toward political opponents.

D. skill at avoiding difficult questions.

8. Read the sentence: *The professor's lecture was praised for its **brevity**; she covered three centuries of history in under twenty minutes.*
The word **brevity** most likely means —

A. depth of historical research.

B. the use of vivid examples.

C. a slow and careful speaking style.

D. the quality of being brief or short.

9. Read the sentence: *The hikers grew **despondent** as the trail grew steeper, the rain harder, and the summit no closer than it had been an hour ago.*
What does **despondent** most likely mean? Name the type of clue (definition, synonym, antonym, example, or general context) and explain how it points to the meaning in 2–3 sentences.

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10. Read the sentence: *The audience was **captivated**, or completely held by attention, as the magician revealed his final card.*
(a) What does **captivated** mean in this sentence? (b) Name the type of context clue the writer used. (c) Write one new sentence of your own that uses **captivated** correctly.

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Answer Keys

1	A	B	**C**	D	6	**A**	B	C	D
2	**A**	B	C	D	7	A	**B**	C	D
3	A	B	C	**D**	8	A	B	C	**D**
4	A	**B**	C	D	9	See below			
5	A	B	**C**	D	10	See below			

Explanations

1. C	The general-context clue (*examining every fiber*, *labeling each photograph*) shows behavior that is **extremely careful and precise**. A is the opposite (*quick and casual* contradicts the careful examination). B grabs the word *details* from the right answer but flips the meaning (the detective USES details, not loses focus on them). D contradicts the evidence that he is doing thorough work.
2. A	*Unlike* signals an **antonym clue**: the halftime speech was *just three short sentences*, so a *verbose* explanation must be the opposite — **using far more words than necessary**. B trades meaning for tone, a different category entirely. C describes a quality of the SHORT speech, not the long one. D guesses based on the Latin look of the word without using the antonym clue.
3. D	The phrase *on the front of the body* works as a **definition clue** placed right beside the word. A names the opposite location (back, not front). B describes what the pouch is made of, not where it is. C confuses WHO uses the pouch with WHERE the pouch sits.
4. B	The word *or persistence* after the comma is a textbook **synonym clue**; *tenacity* means **the quality of refusing to give up**. A is a related skill the sentence shows but not what the word means. C names a different helpful trait (asking for help) that doesn't fit *persistence*. D names an emotion that isn't supported anywhere in the sentence.
5. C	The general-context clues — *red and white stripes* and *visible to ships miles out at sea* — show the lighthouse is **easy to notice and standing out clearly**. A latches onto *gray cliffs* and invents weather wear that isn't there. B grabs the location detail but not what the word means. D contradicts *visible miles out at sea*: a shorter lighthouse would be harder, not easier, to see.
6. A	The follow-up clue (*choose water instead*) shows that *abstain* means **to hold back from** sugary drinks. B sounds like a student reaction to the rule but isn't the word's meaning. C describes a way of drinking, not a choice to avoid drinking. D confuses *abstain* with sharing — the opposite of holding back.
7. B	The colon introduces a **definition clue**: *answered every question honestly, even when the truth was uncomfortable* = **open and honest expression**. A swaps honesty for persuasion. C names a virtue the sentence doesn't mention. D is the OPPOSITE of what the senator did (she answered every question, didn't dodge them).
8. D	The clue *three centuries of history in under twenty minutes* shows **brevity = the quality of being brief or short**. A grabs *history* from the sentence but names research, not length. B names another way a lecture might be praised, but the sentence emphasizes time. C is the OPPOSITE of brief — a slow style would lengthen the lecture.

9.	**Answer:** Despondent most likely means discouraged or losing hope. The general-context clue does the work: the trail grows steeper, the rain harder, and the summit is no closer — a string of disappointments that would naturally drain a hiker's hope. Substituting discouraged back into the sentence keeps the meaning intact.
10.	**Answer:** (a) Captivated means held completely by attention; fascinated. (b) The writer uses a synonym clue set off by or: the phrase completely held by attention directly restates the meaning. (c) Sample sentence: The first-graders were captivated by the storyteller's voice and didn't move for the entire half hour.

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