

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.

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.



Answer Keys

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Explanations	
1. C	The general-context clue (<i>examining every fiber, labeling each photograph</i>) shows behavior that is extremely careful and precise . A is the opposite (<i>quick and casual</i> contradicts the careful examination). B grabs the word <i>details</i> 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	<i>Unlike</i> signals an antonym clue : the halftime speech was <i>just three short sentences</i> , 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 <i>on the front of the body</i> 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 <i>or persistence</i> after the comma is a textbook synonym clue ; <i>tenacity</i> 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 <i>persistence</i> . D names an emotion that isn't supported anywhere in the sentence.
5. C	The general-context clues — <i>red and white stripes</i> and <i>visible to ships miles out at sea</i> — show the lighthouse is easy to notice and standing out clearly . A latches onto <i>gray cliffs</i> and invents weather wear that isn't there. B grabs the location detail but not what the word means. D contradicts <i>visible miles out at sea</i> : a shorter lighthouse would be harder, not easier, to see.
6. A	The follow-up clue (<i>choose water instead</i>) shows that <i>abstain</i> 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 <i>abstain</i> with sharing — the opposite of holding back.
7. B	The colon introduces a definition clue : <i>answered every question honestly, even when the truth was uncomfortable</i> = 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 <i>three centuries of history in under twenty minutes</i> shows brevity = the quality of being brief or short . A grabs <i>history</i> 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 <i>discouraged or losing hope</i>. 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 <i>discouraged</i> back into the sentence keeps the meaning intact.
10.	Answer: (a) Captivated means <i>held completely by attention; fascinated</i>. (b) The writer uses a synonym clue set off by <i>or</i>: the phrase <i>completely held by attention</i> directly restates the meaning. (c) Sample sentence: <i>The first-graders were captivated by the storyteller's voice and didn't move for the entire half hour.</i>



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