

# 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
- 2  A  B  C  D
- 3  A  B  C  D
- 4  A  B  C  D
- 5  A  B  C  D

- 6  A  B  C  D
- 7  A  B  C  D
- 8  A  B  C  D
- 9
- 10

### Explanations


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| <b>1. C</b> | The general-context clue ( <i>examining every fiber, labeling each photograph</i> ) shows behavior that is <b>extremely careful and precise</b> . 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. |
| <b>2. A</b> | <i>Unlike</i> signals an <b>antonym clue</b> : the halftime speech was <i>just three short sentences</i> , so a <i>verbose</i> explanation must be the opposite — <b>using far more words than necessary</b> . 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.               |
| <b>3. D</b> | The phrase <i>on the front of the body</i> works as a <b>definition clue</b> 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.  |
| <b>4. B</b> | The word <i>or persistence</i> after the comma is a textbook <b>synonym clue</b> ; <i>tenacity</i> means <b>the quality of refusing to give up</b> . 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.   |
| <b>5. C</b> | The general-context clues — <i>red and white stripes</i> and <i>visible to ships miles out at sea</i> — show the lighthouse is <b>easy to notice and standing out clearly</b> . 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.   |
| <b>6. A</b> | The follow-up clue ( <i>choose water instead</i> ) shows that <i>abstain</i> means <b>to hold back from</b> 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.   |
| <b>7. B</b> | The colon introduces a <b>definition clue</b> : <i>answered every question honestly, even when the truth was uncomfortable</i> = <b>open and honest expression</b> . 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).   |
| <b>8. D</b> | The clue <i>three centuries of history in under twenty minutes</i> shows <b>brevity = the quality of being brief or short</b> . 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.  |



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| 9.  | <b>Answer:</b> <b>Despondent</b> most likely means <i>discouraged or losing hope</i>. The <b>general-context</b> clue does the work: the trail grows steeper, the rain harder, and the summit is no closer &mdash; 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. | <b>Answer:</b> (a) <b>Captivated</b> means <i>held completely by attention; fascinated</i>. (b) The writer uses a <b>synonym clue</b> 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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