

Using Context Clues

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 10



Quick Review

Grade 7 writers expect you to do more than spot a word you don't know — they expect you to identify the TYPE of clue and read around it. The five clue types worth knowing: a **definition** right beside the word, a **synonym** joined by *or*, an **antonym** signaled by *but*, *unlike*, or *however*, an **example** introduced by *such as* or *including*, and the **general context** of the whole sentence. Name the clue first, then choose the meaning 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: *Although the senator's smile suggested warmth, her **perfunctory** handshake — brief, mechanical, and without eye contact — revealed her disinterest.*

The word **perfunctory** most likely means —

- A. warm and personally engaged.
- B. deeply respectful and formal.
- C. done as a routine, with little care or interest.
- D. openly rude and dismissive.

2. Read the sentence: *Unlike his sister's effusive praise, Marcus offered only an **austere** nod when the team won the trophy.*

The word **austere** most likely means —

- A. plain, stern, and without warmth.
- B. loud and enthusiastic.
- C. embarrassed and apologetic.
- D. playful and teasing.

3. Read the sentence: *Diplomats are trained to be **pragmatic**, or focused on what actually works rather than on ideals alone, when they negotiate treaties.*

The word **pragmatic** most likely means —

- A. ruled by strong personal feelings.
- B. stubborn about traditional rules.
- C. skilled at speaking many languages.
- D. practical and focused on real-world results.



4. Read the sentence: *The general remained an enigma to his officers: he could lose a battle and accept defeat with the same **equanimity** he showed at a quiet breakfast.*

The word **equanimity** most likely means —

- A. rising panic in a crisis.
- B. calmness, especially in difficult situations.
- C. delight at winning competitions.
- D. anger toward enemies and rivals.

5. Read the sentence: *The discovery was entirely **fortuitous** — Dr. Patel had been studying a completely different fungus when she noticed the unusual blue stain on the slide.*

The word **fortuitous** most likely means —

- A. happening by lucky chance rather than by plan.
- B. carefully planned over many years.
- C. embarrassing and easy to overlook.
- D. expensive and dangerous to repeat.

6. Read the sentence: *The treaty was upheld only by a **tenuous** peace: a single broken promise, a single border incident, and the fighting could begin again.*

The word **tenuous** most likely means —

- A. joyful and widely celebrated.
- B. carefully written and printed.
- C. weak, thin, and easily broken.
- D. ancient and rarely remembered.

7. Read the sentence: *Ms. Alvarez was the most **magnanimous** coach in the league: she sent flowers to the rival's hospitalized player and shook every opposing hand even after a loss.*

The word **magnanimous** most likely means —

- A. loud and proud about her victories.
- B. generous and noble in spirit, especially toward others.
- C. secretive about her coaching strategies.
- D. strict about following every league rule.

8. Read the sentence: *Although Theo ostensibly came to the meeting to discuss the budget, he spent the entire hour lobbying for his cousin to get the new job.*

The word **ostensibly** most likely means —

- A. without giving any explanation at all.
- B. with strong evidence behind every claim.
- C. in a loud and aggressive way.
- D. in appearance only; according to the stated reason.



9. Read the sentence: *Caught between loyalty to her old friend and the truth she had just learned, Priya felt deeply **ambivalent** about what to say at the hearing.*

What does **ambivalent** 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 witness's **candor**, or complete honesty even when the truth made him look bad, surprised the prosecutor.*

(a) What does **candor** mean in this sentence? (b) Name the type of context clue the writer used. (c) Write one new sentence of your own that uses **candor** correctly.



Answer Keys

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Explanations	
1. C	The definition clue set off by dashes — <i>brief, mechanical, and without eye contact</i> — shows a perfunctory action is done as a routine, with little care or interest . A is the opposite (the smile suggested warmth, but the handshake did not). B grabs <i>formal</i> from the senator’s setting but ignores the lack-of-care clue. D overshoots: <i>perfunctory</i> is indifferent, not openly rude.
2. A	<i>Unlike</i> signals an antonym clue : <i>effusive praise</i> is warm and overflowing, so <i>austere</i> must be the opposite — plain, stern, and without warmth . B IS effusive, not its opposite. C grabs a feeling that isn’t in the sentence. D treats Marcus as joking, but the antonym clue points to seriousness, not humor.
3. D	The phrase <i>or focused on what actually works rather than on ideals alone</i> is a textbook synonym clue set off by <i>or</i> : <i>pragmatic</i> = practical and focused on real-world results . A is the opposite (feelings, not results). B confuses practical with rigid. C names a useful diplomat trait but not the meaning of this word.
4. B	The general-context clue compares accepting defeat to a <i>quiet breakfast</i> , signaling steady calmness, especially in difficult situations . A is the opposite of staying calm. C describes a reaction to winning, but the sentence describes losing. D names a hot emotion that contradicts the calm <i>breakfast</i> comparison.
5. A	The general-context clue (<i>studying a completely different fungus when she noticed</i>) shows the discovery happened by lucky chance rather than by plan . B is the opposite of accidental. C invents an emotion the sentence does not describe. D adds qualities (cost, danger) not present in the clue.
6. C	The general-context clue — <i>a single broken promise... and the fighting could begin again</i> — shows the peace is weak, thin, and easily broken . A names a tone the sentence flatly contradicts. B grabs an irrelevant feature of the treaty (its physical form). D misreads age for fragility.
7. B	The two example clues — <i>sent flowers to the rival’s hospitalized player</i> and <i>shook every opposing hand even after a loss</i> — point to generous and noble in spirit, especially toward others . A flips humility for boasting. C invents secretiveness from nowhere. D names a rule-following trait that the examples don’t show.
8. D	<i>Although... ostensibly... but he actually spent the hour</i> sets up an antonym-style contrast clue : Theo’s STATED reason was the budget; his REAL reason was the job. Ostensibly means in appearance only; according to the stated reason . A drops the stated-vs-real contrast altogether. B is the opposite (ostensibly signals weak, surface-level reasons). C swaps the meaning for tone.



9.	Answer: Ambivalent most likely means <i>having mixed or conflicting feelings about something</i>. The general-context clue does the work: Priya is <i>caught between loyalty</i> and <i>the truth</i> — two opposing pulls at the same time. Substituting <i>having mixed feelings</i> into the sentence keeps the meaning intact and matches Priya's described situation.
10.	Answer: (a) Candor means <i>complete openness and honesty, even when the truth is uncomfortable</i>. (b) The writer uses a synonym clue set off by <i>or</i>: the phrase <i>complete honesty even when the truth made him look bad</i> directly restates the meaning. (c) Sample sentence: <i>Coach Adler appreciated Maya's candor when she admitted she had skipped two practices that week.</i>



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