



Reading On The Move

Being a Word Detective

Word Attack and Context Clues

As you read, you will come across some words you do not know. These words are called unknown words. It is important to learn the meaning of unknown words to understand the sentence or paragraph you are reading. Looking up the meaning of a word in a dictionary is one way to better understand what you are reading. However, you don't have to look up every unknown word in a dictionary. There are other strategies you can use to try and figure out the meaning of an unknown word. **Word Attack strategies** are helpful ways to figure out the meaning of unknown words while you are reading. Let's explore these strategies:

➤ **Sound it out.**

Say each letter sound out loud. Next, try to blend each letter sound together. Does the word make sense in the sentence? You may know the word when you hear it, but perhaps you just don't recognize it on paper. You may want to review the *Pronunciation Lesson* to make sure you are saying the letter sounds correctly.

Example: If the unknown word is *broken*, say each letter sound out loud: *b-r-o-k-e-n*. Next, blend each letter together: *br-ok-en*. Say those sounds together quickly: *broken*. Do you know the word?

You try!

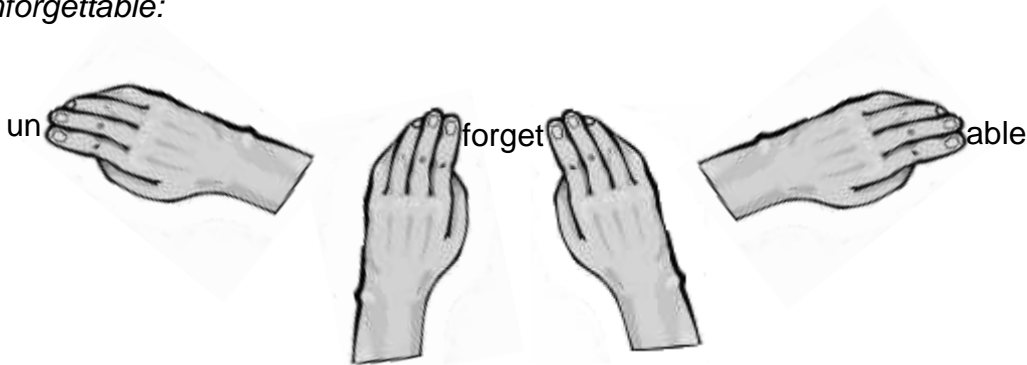
Sound out the word forward: f-o-r-w-a-r-d: for-war-d: forward.

➤ **Chunk it.**

Look in the unknown word for words or letter chunks you already know. Look for prefixes, suffixes, and root words that might give you a clue about the meaning of the word. You may want to review the *Prefix, Suffix, and Root Words Lesson*. You can use your fingers to chunk the unknown word.

Example:

Unforgettable:



By breaking this word into prefix, root word, and suffix, we can see that unforgettable means not able to forget.

You try! Break the word below into prefix, root word, and suffix to understand the meaning.

dishonestly

1. What is the prefix? _____ What does it mean? _____
2. What is the root word? _____
3. What is the suffix? _____ What does it mean? _____
4. What does dishonestly mean? _____

➤ **Reread.**

Read the sentence many times. What word would make sense in place of the unknown word?

➤ **Make connections.**

Does the unknown word look like another word you know? Try putting the known word in place of the unknown word in the sentence. Does the sentence make sense?

➤ **Use what you know.**

What do you already know about the subject of the passage you are reading? Do you know another word that has to do with the subject that might make sense in the sentence?

➤ **Use picture clues.**

Are there people, objects, or actions in the pictures that give you a clue about what word might make sense in the sentence?

➤ **Skip it.**

Skip over the unknown word and see if you can still understand the sentence.

Use these *Word Attack strategies* to figure out the meaning of each underlined word in the passage on the next page. Answer the questions that follow.



A black rhinoceros is known to charge anyone or anything that it feels is a threat. Black rhinos use the two horns that protrude from the middle of their foreheads as protection during fights. Their horns are made out of something that is much like human fingernails and are so sharp they can be lethal in a fight. The only real threat to a black rhino is human

poachers. The poachers have illegally hunted the black rhino for many years. The number of black rhinos left in the world is so low that they were put on the endangered species list.

5. What does the word protrude mean? _____

What strategy did you use to figure out the meaning of this word?

6. What does lethal mean? _____

What strategy did you use to figure out the meaning of this word?

7. What are poachers? _____

What strategy did you use to figure out the meaning of this word?

8. What are endangered species? _____

What strategy did you use to figure out the meaning of this phrase?

Along with *Word Attack strategies*, using **Context Clues** is also helpful in figuring out the meaning of an unknown word. Context Clues are clues in the rest of the sentence or paragraph that might tell you the meaning of the unknown word.

Let's explore the different types of context clues:

- **Synonyms** are words that have the same meaning. For example, *complete* and *finish* are synonyms because they mean the same thing. One great way to find synonyms is in a **thesaurus**. A thesaurus is a lot like a dictionary. Words are listed in alphabetical order; however, a thesaurus lists synonyms instead of definitions.

Example: *David felt **lackadaisical**. He wondered how he had become so lazy.*

You can find out the meaning of *lackadaisical* by using clues in the next sentence. *Lackadaisical* and *lazy* are synonyms.

- **Antonyms** are words that have the opposite meanings. For example, *start* and *finish* are antonyms.

Example: *Pedro thought his paycheck would be small, but it ended up being **enormous**.*

Try identifying some synonyms and antonyms. Write an “S” if you believe the words are synonyms and an “A” if you believe the words are antonyms. The first one is done for you.

- S 9. drink, beverage
____ 10. up, down
____ 11. sunny, bright
____ 12. shut, closed
____ 13. smile, frown

Now, try identifying some synonyms and antonyms in sentences. Write an “S” if you believe the underlined words are synonyms and an “A” if you believe the words are antonyms. The first one is done for you.

- A 14. I wore my raincoat today because I thought it was supposed to be rainy, but it turned out to be very sunny.
____ 15. Sarah had a huge grin on her face. Her smile was one of the first things Don noticed about her. He felt so lucky to be marrying her.
____ 16. Fred knew he broke his arm when he fell off the tractor. The doctor confirmed the fracture and informed him that a cast would be needed for six weeks.
____ 17. I thought my brother was going to repair my broken door handle.

- Sometimes the unknown word is **explained** right in the sentence or paragraph.

Example: *People who are affected by **narcolepsy** are not allowed to drive. The disease is very serious and the risk of falling asleep while driving is much too dangerous.*

The first sentence doesn't tell us much about the meaning of the word *narcolepsy*. But we can gather more information from the following sentences. The two clues, *disease* and *falling asleep*, tell us that narcolepsy is a disease that involves falling asleep...even while driving!

- **Specific examples** are wonderful context clues.

Example: *In this class we will be studying **celestial bodies**, such as the sun, moon, and stars.*

We can gather from the examples given, that celestial bodies (like the sun, moon, and stars) are natural objects found in outer space.

- Often times the **definition** of an unknown word is given right in the sentence or paragraph.

Example: ***Bovino**phobia, or the fear of cows, affects less than 2% of the population.*

The definition of bovinophobia is in the sentence. It is usually between two commas, so if you took the definition out it would still be a complete sentence: *Bovino*phobia affects less than 2% of the population.

Look at the underlined word in each sentence. Use the context clues to decide whether the word used explanation, specific examples, or a definition. Circle the correct answer.

18. I like to go spelunking. Exploring deep, dark caves has been a hobby of mine for almost ten years.
- a. explanation
 - b. specific example
 - c. definition
19. The woman who drew my blood at the hospital, the phlebotomist, was very gentle.
- a. explanation
 - b. specific example
 - c. definition
20. There are many marine invertebrates in our aquarium. You will see clams, lobsters, starfish, and even jellyfish.
- d. explanation
 - e. specific example
 - f. definition

- Sometimes you can gather information from the rest of the sentence or paragraph that will help you understand the meaning of an unknown word. This is called **inferring**.

Example: *Migrant workers are transient. They move a lot from place to place depending on the season. They may live in Florida for a while picking oranges and then move to New York and harvest potatoes. Some migrants travel the same routes year after year, following the crops as they are ready to be harvested.*

What clues in this paragraph tell us what the word *transient* means? We find out that **a)** migrants move a lot from place to place, **b)** migrants may live in Florida then move to New York, and **c)** some migrants travel the same routes year after year. From these clues we can **infer** that *transient* means to move from place to place.

Try inferring on your own! Read the example and answer the questions on the next page.

Pesticides *are sprayed on crops by farmers to kill bugs. Bugs can damage plants and even ruin entire crops. Farmworkers must be careful not to touch or breathe pesticides and other chemicals found around the farm because they can become very sick.*

21. What does the word **pesticide** mean?

22. What context clues in the sentences helped you understand the meaning of the word?

Read the passage below. Use the Context Clue strategies you have learned in this lesson to explain the meaning of each bolded word. Answer the questions on the next page.

Nicotine is a chemical found in the leaves of the tobacco plant. Tobacco is used to make cigarettes. Nicotine and other chemicals in tobacco smoke may damage a person's **internal organs**, such as his or her lungs, heart, and liver. To work **efficiently**, the lungs must be free of fluid so that they can take air in and force air out. And they must be clean. The cleaner the lungs, the better they work. Cigarette smoke dirties the lungs and leaves thick fluid called **tar**. The more tar in the lungs, the less the lungs work making it hard for a person to breathe. Because nicotine is very **addictive**, it makes it very hard to stop smoking.



23. What is *nicotine*?

24. What clues helped you figure out the meaning of this word?

25. What are some examples of *internal organs*?

26. What clues helped you figure out the meaning of the word *efficiently*?

27. What is *tar*? _____

28. Why is it so hard to stop smoking?

➔ Answer Key

1. The prefix is **dis**. It means “not”.
2. The root word is **honest**.
3. The suffix is **ly**. It means “in this way.”
4. **Dishonestly** means “not in an honest way.”
5. Protrude means: to project or jut out.
6. Lethal means: deadly.
7. Poachers are: illegal hunters.
8. Endangered species are: animals that are in danger of completely dying out.
9. S
10. A
11. S
12. S
13. A
14. A
15. S
16. S
17. A
18. a
19. e
20. b
21. Pesticides are chemicals that are sprayed on crops to protect them from bugs.
22. In this paragraph we can gather that pesticides are sprayed on crops in order to keep bugs away that can ruin entire crops. We also can gather that pesticides are chemicals that can be harmful to people as well.
23. Nicotine is a chemical found in the leaves of the tobacco plant.
24. The definition of nicotine is given in the text.
25. Some internal organs are lungs, heart, and liver.
26. The text states that the cleaner the lungs are the better they work. In order for lungs to work efficiently, they must be clean.
27. Tar is a thick fluid in the lungs caused by cigarette smoke.
28. It is hard to stop smoking because nicotine is very addictive.