

CONTEXT CLUES

Level 1 Reading: use surrounding words and ideas to work out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary.

1. What are context clues?

Context clues are words, phrases or sentences around an unfamiliar word that help you work out its meaning. In Level 1 Reading, you may need to choose an alternative word or phrase that keeps the meaning of the original sentence the same.

A simple strategy	
1. Read around the word. Read the whole sentence and, if needed, the sentence before and after it.	3. Check the word type. Is it a noun, verb, adjective or adverb?
2. Look for clues. Notice explanations, examples, contrasts, causes or results.	4. Use the substitution test. Replace the word with your possible synonym. Does the sentence still make sense?

2. Common types of context clue

Clue type	Example	How it helps
Definition / explanation	A botanist, a scientist who studies plants, visited the class.	The meaning is explained directly.
Synonym / restatement	The task was brief, or short, so it took only ten minutes.	A similar word gives the meaning.
Example	Protective clothing, such as gloves and goggles, is required.	The examples show what is included.
Contrast	Unlike the noisy main road, this street is tranquil.	The opposite idea helps reveal the meaning.
Cause / result	The path was slippery, so walkers moved slowly.	The result gives a clue.

3. Word type can help

Word types and useful examples	
Noun: a person, place, thing or idea. salary = pay / wages / earnings Verb: an action. reduce = decrease / make less consider = think about	Adjective: describes a noun. vital = essential / important sizeable = large / substantial Adverb: describes how, when or how much. especially = particularly / mainly

4. Pearson-style substitution practice

Word	Possible replacement	Quick check
vital	essential / crucial / important	Does it still mean necessary or very important?
reduce	decrease / lower / make less	Is the amount becoming smaller?
top-class	excellent / outstanding / first-rate	Does it still mean very good?
focus	concentrate / target / aim	Does it fit the grammar of the sentence?
sizeable	large / substantial / considerable	Does it still describe something as large?
consider	think about / examine / keep in mind	Does it still show thinking?
salary	pay / wages / earnings	Does it still mean money earned from work?
especially	particularly / mainly / in particular	Does it still show special emphasis?

5. Common mistakes

- Do not guess from the unfamiliar word alone.
- Do not choose a synonym with the wrong word type.
- Do not choose a word that changes the meaning of the sentence.
- Do read before and after the word, then test your answer in the sentence.