

READING

Vocabulary in Context

While a dictionary can give you the most accurate meaning of a word, taking time to look up words is distracting and will cause you to lose track of what the passage meant. Instead, using the context clues to understand the word keeps your mind on the topic and helps you determine an **approximate definition**.

*When Russia was under the control of Josef Stalin, **dissidents** were routinely shot or imprisoned in hospitals for the mentally ill. Stalin did not allow anyone to express disagreement or discontent with his policies.*

→ **dissidents** ≈ people who disagree

Four Common Context Clues

Example	<p>The author includes the behavior, attitude, or event associated with the word.</p> <p><i>The discussion was becoming increasingly belligerent; no matter what was said, someone in the group would <u>challenge it in an angry voice</u>.</i></p>
Contrast	<p>The author tells you what the word does not mean.</p> <p><i>At first the smell was <u>almost flowerlike</u>, but in a matter of minutes it became harsh and acrid.</i></p>
Restatement	<p>The author gives you a synonym or word close in meaning.</p> <p><i>His behavior was eccentric; but in New York, it wasn't all that unusual for people to be <u>odd</u>.</i></p> <p>NOTE: In textbooks, the authors are more likely to give you an exact definition enclosed by commas, parentheses, or dashes.</p> <p><i>Cognition -- <u>thinking or knowing</u> -- has been the subject of numerous studies.</i></p>
General Knowledge	<p>The passage describes an experience or event with which you are likely familiar. If you are from another country, these will be the hardest to use. Learning more about American culture will help.</p> <p><i>Football and basketball coaches are frequently known for their volatile tempers.</i></p>

Practice: underline the clues, then try writing an approximate definition

1. According to the myth, the hero Achilles was **vulnerable** in just one area of his body. He could be killed only if he was wounded in the heel.

Vulnerable means _____

2. The candidate had expected to win but instead she was **trounced** by her opponent, who won by a landslide.

Trounced means _____

3. Before allowing someone to deliver a personal opinion on the air, most television news programs issue a **disclaimer** that denies all responsibility for the views expressed.

Disclaimer means _____

4. The Chinese novelist Ha Jin is an amazingly **perceptive** writer, who understands human behavior in a way that few novelists can.

Perceptive means _____

5. In his 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, novelist John Steinbeck movingly describes the **plight** of migrant farm workers in California forced to work under brutal and dehumanizing conditions.

Plight means _____

6. Inventors don't necessarily care if their inventions are **lucrative**; often they just have an idea they are desperate to make reality, and money doesn't matter.

Lucrative means _____

7. Looking filthy and **disreputable** after being lost for a month in the woods, the children were finally discovered by a team of hunting dogs.

Disreputable means _____

8. The parents realized that Jonah was a child **prodigy** when his teacher told them that the eight-year-old was reading books written for high school students.

Prodigy means _____

9. The soldier was a member of an **elite** group of special forces who had been highly trained just for such international emergencies.

Elite means _____