

Functional Skills English Entry 3 | Context Clues
Context Clues Handout

Functional Skills English Entry 3 Reading

What are context clues?

Context clues are hints in the words and sentences around an unfamiliar word. They help you work out the meaning without guessing.

4-step strategy

Step	What to do
1	Read the whole sentence.
2	Read the sentence before and after.
3	Look for clue words, examples or opposite ideas.
4	Try a meaning and check if it makes sense.

Main clue types

Clue type	How it helps	Example
Definition / restatement	The sentence gives the meaning directly.	The medicine was hazardous, which means dangerous if used carelessly.
Example clues	Examples show what the word probably means.	The hall was congested with people, bags, buggies and trolleys.
Contrast clues	An opposite idea helps you work out the word.	Ravi is usually confident, but today he felt apprehensive.
Cause/effect clues	What happens because of the word gives a clue.	The bridge was unstable, so the council closed it.
General sense	The whole sentence or paragraph helps you choose a meaning.	The queue was enormous; it went around the corner.

Clue words to watch for

Purpose	Useful clue words
Definition	which means, that is, in other words, called, or
Example	such as, including, for example, like
Contrast	but, however, although, unlike, whereas, instead
Cause/effect	because, so, therefore, as a result, due to

Word type clues

Word type	Question to ask	Example
Noun	Is it a thing, person or idea?	solution, information, complaint
Verb	Is it an action?	investigate, reduce, complain
Adjective	Does it describe a noun?	cautious, fragile, urgent
Adverb	Does it describe an action?	carefully, immediately, politely

Exam tip

If two meanings look possible, choose the one that fits the whole sentence. Always use evidence from the text.

Mini practice

Read the sentence: The instructions were precise: they gave the exact time, place and steps.

The word precise means: _____

The clue is: _____