

Words and Their Meanings

Section 1.1 Understanding Words by Knowing Roots and Affixes



Key Terms 1.1

- **Affix** – a word part added to either the beginning or the end of a root word or base word; a general term for either a prefix or a suffix
- **Part of speech** – the role that a word plays in a sentence; the eight general parts of speech are noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection
- **Root word** – the main part of a word

Have you ever thought about how much you read every day? Reading is a skill necessary for functioning in daily life, whether in school or at home. Reading requires that you recognize and understand words and their meanings, but it also requires you to process and use the information given as a whole. *That* is why you are holding this particular book. As you work through this book, you will sharpen your reading skills and your ability to understand and use what you read.

Regardless of what you are reading, comprehending the information depends on understanding most of the words being used. When you read a word that is unfamiliar or unknown, there are several skills that you can use to help you to understand what the word means even if you don't know its definition. One of those skills is looking for clues in the word itself by breaking the word into parts.

Roots, Prefixes, and Suffixes

The main part of a word is its **root**. An **affix** is a part of a word that is added either to the beginning of a root word or to its end. The root and the affix(es) make up a complete word. If a word is unfamiliar to you, knowing meanings of root words and affixes may help you to determine the meaning of the word. They may at least give you a hint towards understanding the word's meaning.

Example 1: Consider the word slothful. What is the root word? What affix(es) can you identify? Using these clues, what do you think the word means?

Sloth is the root word, and *-ful* is a suffix. A sloth is an animal that is known for being very slow, but the word *sloth* can also mean “laziness.” The suffix *-ful* means “full of.” Taking these clues, you can determine that *slothful* means to be “full of laziness” or simply “lazy.” For example, a slothful bank teller may seem in no hurry to help the next customer despite the long line.

Example 2: Consider the word hydrotherapy. Based on the root word and prefix, what do you think it means?

If you know *hydro* means “water,” you can see that *hydrotherapy* must mean “therapy using water.”

Context of Words

Section 2.2

Understanding a Word in a Paragraph



Key Term 2.2

- **Annotation** – a note that comments on or offers an explanation for a portion of text

You've already seen that *context clues* are clues found in the text around a word, but those clues are not limited to the sentence in which the word appears. Often, the sentences before and/or after a difficult word will give you clues to what the word means. These clues may appear in the same paragraph or even in a surrounding paragraph.

Review the types of context clues:

Types of Context Clues

- Definitions/Descriptions
- Examples
- Synonyms/Antonyms
- Inferences
- Cause/Effect Relationships
- Comparisons/Contrasts
- Alternative Definitions or Meanings

Here are some steps that might help you determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

1. Determine the main message of the passage. Recap into your own words.
2. Reread the sentence that contains the difficult word. If you don't see enough context clues in that sentence, reread the sentences before it and after it. Reread the entire paragraph and the paragraph before and after. These sentences may give you context for the unfamiliar word. Look for specific types of context clues by asking the following questions:
 - Is the word defined in another sentence, or do other sentences describe the word?
 - Does the author give examples that give context to the word?
 - Are synonyms or antonyms used that might apply to the word?
 - From the content given in other sentences, what can you infer about the meaning of the word?
 - Is the word used in a cause and effect relationship? What do other sentences reveal about this relationship?
 - Does the author make comparisons or contrasts that give context to the word?
 - Does the word have an alternative meaning that may be explained or used in the paragraph?
3. Based on context clues, decide what you think the word meaning may be and then imagine your meaning replacing the word in the passage. Does it fit in the passage?

As you read a passage of text, making notes of unfamiliar words and the possible clues to their meanings can be a useful exercise. Any note that comments on or gives an explanation to the text you are reading is called an **annotation**. Making your own notes, or *annotating*, can help you to analyze what you are reading.

Section 2.2, continued

Understanding a Word in a Paragraph

excerpt from *Jane Eyre*, Chapter 5
by Charlotte Brontë, 1847

The only marked event of the afternoon was, that I saw the girl with whom I had conversed in the verandah dismissed in disgrace by Miss Scatcherd from a history class, and sent to stand in the middle of the large schoolroom. The punishment seemed to me in a high degree (ignominious), especially for so great a girl — she looked thirteen or upwards. I expected she would show signs of great distress and shame; but to my surprise she neither wept nor blushed; composed, though grave, she stood, the central mark of all eyes. . . .

Ignominious describes punishment.
The punishment was to stand in the middle of the large schoolroom.
If that happened to me, I'd be embarrassed. Could ignominious mean embarrassing?
The narrator thinks the ignominious punishment would result in distress and shame, weeping or blushing.
Narrator is surprised that she remained composed even with all eyes on her.

Did you make similar notes and observations? Now consider this question being asked on a multiple-choice test. Does the annotation help in answering the following question?

Example 1: What does the word ignominious mean in the above excerpt?

- A. humorous
- B. appropriate
- C. humiliating
- D. isolating

In this example, the meaning of *ignominious* can be found by understanding the context clues that are given in other sentences in the paragraph. Consider what this paragraph is saying by rewriting the main points in your own words. Use notes from your annotation to help:

The girl was dismissed in disgrace. She was sent to stand in the middle of the large school room. The narrator expected her to show signs of distress and shame. Surprisingly, she did not, but she did look grave as everyone looked at her.

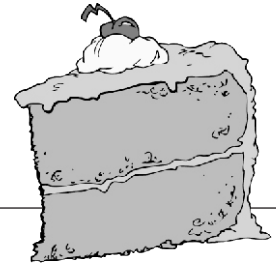
Her punishment is described as *ignominious*. From these context clues, you should be able to see that *ignominious* means *humiliating*, so **C** is the correct answer. Nothing in the paragraph indicates that the punishment was humorous or appropriate. And since the punishment was public, it could not be considered isolating. Replace the word *ignominious* with *humiliating*. Notice that it fits the context perfectly.

The annotation note that questioned if the word may be related to embarrassment was right on track since *humiliating* and *embarrassing* are synonyms.

Figurative Language

Section 4.1

Common Figures of Speech



Key Terms 4.1

- **Analogy** – an extended simile or metaphor that shows how two things are similar in several ways
- **Euphemism** – words or phrases that are inoffensive or kinder to replace offensive, harsh, or hurtful ones
- **Figurative language** – a broad category that includes figures of speech as well as sound devices and imagery
- **Figure of speech** – a word or phrase used in a non-literal sense for a specific effect; most commonly includes idioms, euphemisms, similes, metaphors, analogies, personification, hyperbole, oxymoron
- **Hyperbole** – an exaggeration
- **Idiom** – an expression that means something different from the literal definition of the words in the expression, such as “I’m all ears.” or “Let’s call it a day.”
- **Metaphor** – a direct comparison between two things without using *like* or *as*
- **Oxymoron** – an expression that combines contradictory words, such as *cold fire* or *organized chaos*
- **Personification** – an expression that gives human characteristics to non-human or inanimate objects
- **Simile** – a comparison of two things that uses the words *like* or *as*

Let’s build upon what has already been discussed. An author will choose specific words or phrases in order to express a certain message. **Figurative language** is a collection of literary devices, or writing techniques, that includes figures of speech as well as sound devices, imagery, and juxtaposition. Other terms often used interchangeably with *figurative language* are *stylistic devices* or *rhetorical devices*. By using different types of figurative language, an author greatly expands his or her ability to communicate effectively. Using our ongoing example of building a wall, figurative language offers additional building materials. Figurative language is a broad category, so let’s focus first on the most commonly used figures of speech.

A **figure of speech** is a word or phrase used non-literally to create an effect. Multiple figures of speech are used by authors to create a greater impact with their words. Why might an author use a figure of speech instead of writing literally — word for word — what he or she means? Figures of speech are better for creating a visual image or an emotional response for the reader. They can also clarify for the reader the exact message the author is trying to communicate. In order to better understand the power of figures of speech, consider each of the common ones that follow.

Idioms

Idioms are expressions that mean something different from the literal definition of the words used in the expression. You’ve already seen idioms in Section 3.3 as examples of informal language. They are very common in both written and spoken language. Look at the following chart of a few examples and think about the last time you may have used one of these phrases in conversation.

Examples of Idioms and Their Meanings

A piece of cake — something is easy to do
Crack someone up — make someone laugh
Food for thought — something to think about

Hit the books — study, especially for a test
On pins and needles — anxious in anticipation
Under the weather — feeling sick

Analyzing Paragraphs

Section 5.3 Summarizing



Key Terms 5.3

- **Bias** – an opinion that shows a partiality for or prejudice against someone, something, or some idea
- **Opinion** – a view, judgement, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter
- **Summary** – a paraphrased shorter version of the text that includes only the main points

Now that you have mastered identifying the main idea and its supporting details as evidence, the next step is to condense a paragraph that you are reading into fewer words. A **summary** is a shorter version of the text that paraphrases only the main idea and the main supporting details. In other words, a summary of a paragraph uses your own words to communicate only the most important points.

Pitfalls in Writing a Summary

Before looking at the steps to use in summarizing, first consider the things you should be careful NOT to do.

- An **opinion** is a view, judgement, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter. In other words, opinions are personal beliefs based on attitudes, thoughts, judgements, or feelings. If you wrote an article about the best aspects of your home town, that article would be based on your opinions. When writing a summary, be careful that you do not include your own personal opinion regarding the text nor your interpretation of the author's message.
- When you read about a topic that interests you, be aware that you may have a bias concerning that topic. A **bias** is an opinion that causes you to show partiality for or prejudice against someone, something, or some idea. A bias will make it more difficult for you to be impartial. Think about reading an article about a rival football team that praises all the strengths of the team. If you greatly dislike this rival team, you could easily allow your bias to peek through when analyzing this article. When writing a summary, be sure you do not allow your own personal bias to influence what you write. Avoid using overly positive, overly negative, or emotionally charged language. These types of words convey bias.
- Do not add information or evidence that is not in the text. Remember that the summary's purpose is to highlight the main points and the most important supporting details. Have you ever heard the expression, "Just tell me what time it is, not how to build a clock!"? That expression is the essence of your summary.
- Do not use the author's words unless necessary for clarity. As explained in paraphrasing, occasionally you will need to use specific words from the text in order to adequately create the summary, especially if there simply is no other word that accurately communicates the message. If you choose to use the same word, be intentional in your mind that it is to communicate the message in the summary and that you are not trying to take the easy way out. Sometimes it may be best to quote a phrase or sentence from the original paragraph, but if you do so, you must enclose those words in quotation marks to indicate that it is a direct quote.

Section 5.3, continued

Summarizing

Purpose of a Summary

The main purpose of a summary is to give a brief overview of a longer text. Summaries can save a reader time when looking for specific information since the reader can more quickly see the main points. The reader can then decide whether or not to read the longer work for additional details. Summaries are used in many fields. For example, they are used in business proposals, book reviews, and medical journals. Therefore, writing effective summaries is a skill that may be important to your future career.

Learning how to write a good summary and practicing this skill also has important benefits. Just as with paraphrasing a paragraph or with communicating a main idea and details in your own words, creating a summary helps you to understand information more clearly and to retain that information longer. You actually will remember something better when you have taken the time to process it and put it in your own words.

Steps For Writing a Good Summary

1. Learn to read actively. Read the paragraph for the first time without highlighting anything. This first reading will give you a general sense of the content of the text. Then re-read with annotation. Highlight or underline the words or phrases that seem to be connected. Ignore unnecessary details or descriptions remembering that your purpose is to write a summary, not a paraphrase.
2. As you learned with main ideas, the author’s core message will be either stated or implied. Look for those key phrases that point you in a specific direction. What is the author trying to tell you? That message or main idea needs to be the core of your summary, which will then be supported with the important details you have identified. Extraneous details are not important in a summary. Look only for the details that are key evidence for the main idea, and make note of them for inclusion in your summary. It may be helpful to write a short list of the most important points made in the paragraph.
3. Write the first sentence of your summary as the retelling of the main idea in your own words. Then write as few sentences as are needed to condense the key details. Your summary should be no longer than about 25% of the original text. A long paragraph that is full of description but not necessarily supporting evidence will not require a long summary and may be quite short.
4. Remember to avoid common pitfalls. Use neutral, unbiased language. Write objectively without personal opinions or emotions.
5. Read what you have written. Ask yourself whether your sentences adequately express the thought of the original text. If someone reads your summary instead of the original text, will he or she have the same understanding that you do?

Re-read the following excerpt from the short story “The Fair Courier: A Story of the American Revolution” by T. S. Arthur that you first saw in Section 5.1. Consider how this excerpt is annotated for the purpose of summarizing it.

Section 5.3, continued

Summarizing

excerpt from “**The Fair Courier: A Story of the American Revolution**”
by T. S. Arthur

In the mean time, General Greene, who had heard through messengers from Colonel Lee of the proposed abandonment of [post] Ninety-six, and the division of the British and Tory forces, was making preparations to retrace his steps, and strike, if possible, a decisive blow against Lord Rawdon. In order to make certain of victory, it was necessary to inform Sumter of his designs, and effect a junction with him before attacking the enemy. But, thus far, no one offered to perform the dangerous service.

General Green heard Post Ninety-six to be abandoned. British and Tory forces to be divided. Greene made plans to attack and defeat Lord Rawdon. He needed to inform Sumter. He wants to join with Sumter before attacking enemy forces. No one had volunteered to take the message to Sumter. Dangerous mission.

In the annotation of this paragraph, notice that only key ideas are underlined in the text. Those key ideas are then reworded to the side. This paragraph contains three key ideas:

1. *When General Greene learned of plans to abandon post Ninety-six and to divide British and Tory forces, he made plans to attack and defeat Lord Rawdon.* This statement could act as the implied main idea of the paragraph.
2. *Before attacking, General Greene needed to inform Sumter of his plans.* This statement gives a key detail for General Greene’s plans to work.
3. *Taking this message to Sumter is dangerous and no one has volunteered for the job.* This statement also gives a key detail that is preventing Greene from implementing his plan.

Example 1: Based on the annotations and the list of key ideas, read the following summary of this paragraph.

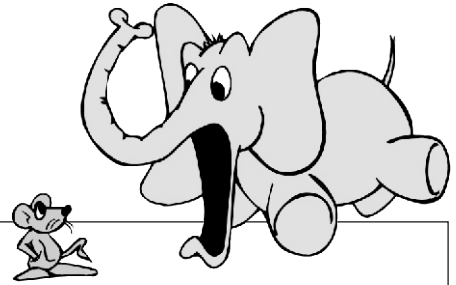
When General Greene learned of possible plans to abandon army post Ninety-six and to divide British and Tory personnel, he began making plans to attack and defeat Lord Rawdon. Before attacking, Greene needed to inform Sumter of his plans. However, the mission to take the message to Sumter was dangerous, and no one had yet volunteered.

Notice that specific details are left out of the summary. It includes the implied main idea with two key follow-up details.

Now read the excerpt on the following page taken from *Inside the Lines* by Earl Derr Biggers and Robert Welles Ritchie published in 1915. Read the paragraph first without making any annotations. Then re-read it with annotation. Remember to look for the core message or main idea as well as key details or ideas that support that main idea. Underline these key ideas. Rewrite the ideas in your own words in your annotation to the side.

Analyzing Central Ideas

Section 6.2 Developing Central and Secondary Ideas



Key Term 6.2

- **Secondary idea** – a complementary idea that provides additional depth to the central idea; additional ideas presented throughout a given work

Developing the Central Idea

In the previous subsection, you practiced identifying a central idea. Now explore in more detail how that central idea develops. In other words, how does the author develop the various points that he or she is trying to communicate? Learn to think in terms of the author’s message when you think about central idea. Imagine that the author is talking to you when you are reading a passage. What do you think he or she is trying to tell you?

Authors have many tools available to them for developing ideas within a text. Some of those tools are more complex than others. An author can utilize illustrations, specific examples, statistics, and quotes to name a few. The author’s purpose in using these tools is to clearly communicate his or her message to the reader. Once again think about that wall you are building. If the only thing the builder uses is plain red brick with no change in the pattern or design as the wall grows higher, it would be a pretty boring wall, wouldn’t it? Now imagine a variation in pattern and in color of bricks. Visualize a window or a doorway inserted. Visualize some of the bricks inset deeper and others pulled out somewhat. The builder is *developing* a wall that portrays his or her design. An author does the same thing.

An author has a central idea in mind when he or she begins writing. In order to communicate that idea to the reader, an author uses supporting details to *develop* that message. If you can recognize how an author uses those supporting details, you will better understand the author’s message.

The most efficient method for you to use to trace the development of a central idea is to once again utilize annotation. Hopefully by now you are growing more comfortable with the process of annotating text. If annotating can become second nature to you, you will fly through your test questions. Well, maybe not fly, but at least you won’t crawl!

In the previous subsection, you read an excerpt from *The Conquest of Fear* by Basil King. You may remember that the central idea of the passage is *fear is present in all stages of life and is shared by most people*. Reread the first paragraph of this passage and consider how it is annotated to trace the development of this central idea. How do the details support the author’s message regarding fear?

excerpt from *The Conquest of Fear*, Chapter I
by Basil King

1 When I say that during most of my conscious life I have been a prey to fears I take it for granted that I am expressing the case of the majority of people. I cannot remember the time when a dread of one kind or another was not in the air. In childhood it was the fear of going to bed, of that mysterious time when regular life was still going on downstairs, while I was buried alive under sheets and blankets. Later it was the fear of school, the first contact of the tender little soul with life’s crudeness. Later still

→ He has had fears all his life.

→ Most people have fears.

→ He doesn't remember a time when he didn't fear.

→ Example of childhood fear.

→ Another example of childhood fear.

continue

