

Six Types of Context Clues		
Clue	Description	Sample Sentence
<i>Definition</i>	Readers use the definition in the sentence to understand the unknown word.	Some spiders spin silk with tiny organs called <i>spinnerets</i> .
<i>Example-Illustration</i>	Readers use an example or illustration to understand the unknown word.	Toads, frogs, and some birds are <i>predators</i> that hunt and eat spiders.
<i>Contrast</i>	Readers understand the unknown word because it is compared or contrasted with another word in the sentence.	Most spiders live for about one year, but <i>tarantulas</i> sometimes live for 20 years or more!
<i>Logic</i>	Readers think about the rest of the sentence to understand the unknown word.	An <i>exoskeleton</i> acts like a suit of armor to protect the spider.
<i>Root Words and Affixes</i>	Readers use their knowledge of root words and affixes to figure out the unknown word.	People who are terrified of spiders have <i>arachnophobia</i> .
<i>Grammar</i>	Readers use the word's function in the sentence or its part of speech to figure out the unknown word.	Most spiders <i>molt</i> five to ten times.

Notes about Context Clues

The six types of context clues do not operate in isolation; two or three types of contextual information are often included in the same sentence.

The readers' differing levels of background knowledge affect the types of word-identification strategies they can use effectively.

Context clues rarely provide enough information in a sentence to help students learn a word. The clues may seem to be useful to someone who already knows a word, but context clues often provide only partial information, and the information can be misleading. Researchers do recommend that students be taught how to use context clues because some clues are useful, and they do help students develop word-learning strategies to use on their own.

Students who read books at their grade level had a 1 in 20 chance of learning the meaning of any word from context. That might seem insignificant, but if students read 20,000 words a year, and if they learn 1 of every 20 words from context, they would learn 1000 words. That could be done if students read 30 minutes daily.

The best way to teach students about context clues is by modeling.

It is interesting to note that capable and less capable readers learn from context at about the same rate. Researchers have speculated that the difference in vocabulary growth is due to differences in the amount of words that students read, not the differences in their reading achievement.