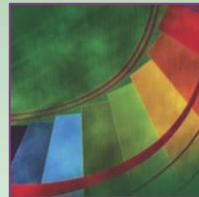
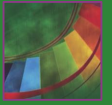


SIXTH EDITION

TEN STEPS  
TO  
ADVANCING  
COLLEGE READING SKILLS

John Langan





# 1

## Vocabulary in Context

If you were asked to define the word *ubiquitous*, you might have some difficulty. On the other hand, if you saw this word in a sentence, chances are you could come up with a fairly accurate definition.

Look at the sentence below and see if the **context** helps you figure out the meaning of the word *ubiquitous*.

Smartphones have become *ubiquitous*; you can see them—and hear them—everywhere.

*Ubiquitous* means

- A.** unaffordable.      **B.** complicated.      **C.** widespread.

The **context** tells you the meaning of *ubiquitous*.

Smartphones have become *ubiquitous*; you can see them—and hear them—everywhere.

*Ubiquitous* means

A. unaffordable.

B. complicated.



C. widespread.

The word *everywhere* suggests that *ubiquitous* means “widespread.”

Using context clues to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words will help you in several ways.

- 1 It will **save you time** when reading. You will not have to stop to look up words in the dictionary.
- 2 After you figure out the meaning of a particular word more than once through its context, it may become a part of your **working vocabulary**. You will therefore add to your vocabulary simply by reading thoughtfully.
- 3 It will **give you a good sense of how a word is actually used**, including any shades of meaning it might have.

# Types of Context Clues

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There are four common types of **context clues**.

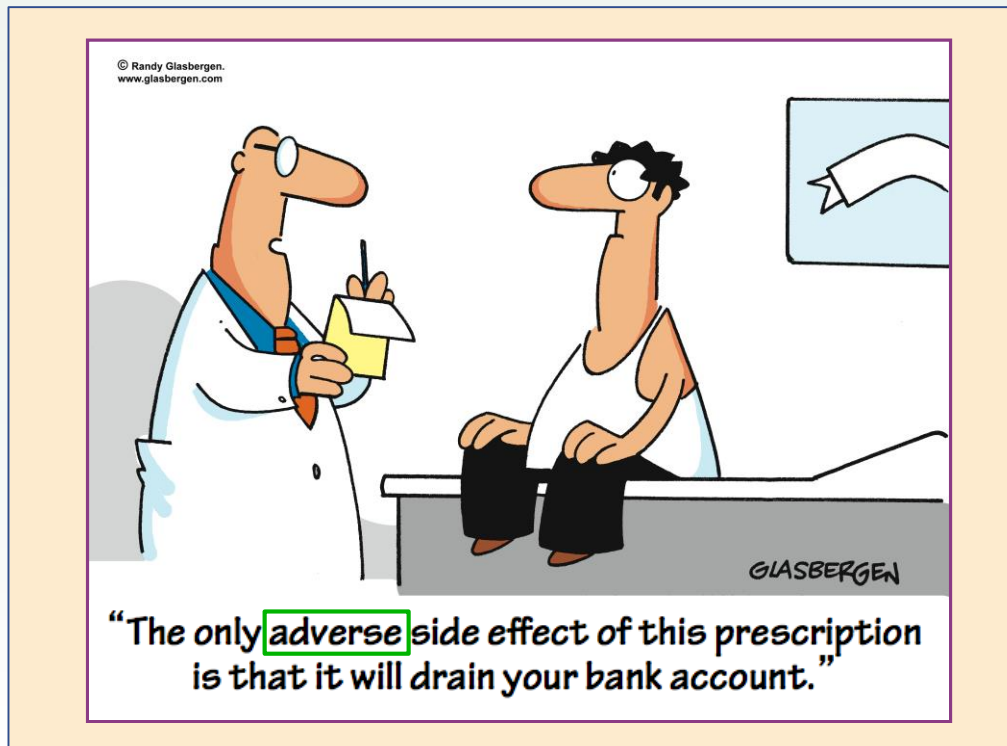
- 1 Examples
- 2 Synonyms
- 3 Antonyms
- 4 General Sense of the Sentence or Passage

## 1 Examples

**Examples** may suggest the meaning of an unknown word.



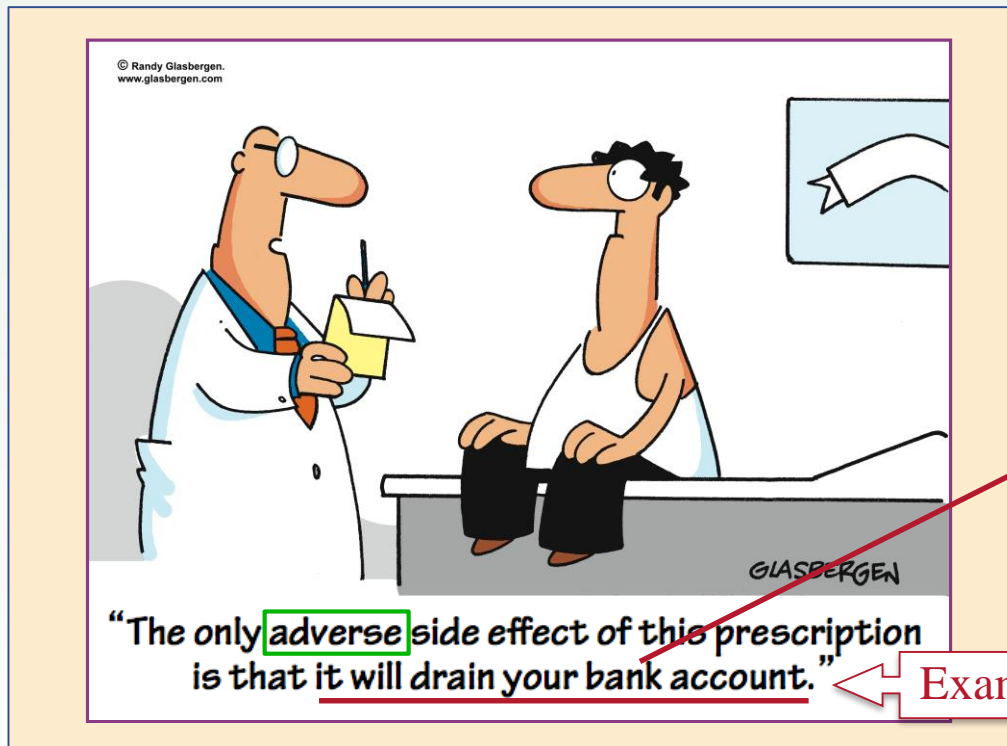
See if the **example** in this cartoon helps you figure out the meaning of the word *adverse*.



The word *adverse* means

- A. known.
- B. pleasant.
- C. harmful.

The **example** of an adverse side effect—it will drain the patient’s bank account—helps you understand that *adverse* means “harmful.”



The word *adverse* means

A. known.

B. pleasant.

✓ C. harmful.

Example

In the sentence below, the examples are **boldfaced**. Use the examples to help you figure out the meaning of the *italicized* word.

As they moved westward, early pioneers faced many *tribulations*, such as **scarce food**, **extreme weather**, and **loneliness**.

*Tribulations* means

- A.** criminals.      **B.** hard decisions.      **C.** great difficulties.

The examples of what the pioneers faced may have helped you realize that *tribulations* means “great difficulties.”

As they moved westward, early pioneers faced many *tribulations*, such as scarce food, extreme weather, and loneliness.

*Tribulations* means

- A. criminals.      B. hard decisions.       C. great difficulties.

Examples are often introduced with **signal words and phrases** like *for example*, *for instance*, *including*, and *such as*.

As they moved westward, early pioneers faced many tribulations, **such as** scarce food, extreme weather, and loneliness.

Signal phrase

Examples

*Hint:* When you use context clues to figure out the meaning of a word, actually insert into the sentence the word you think is the answer. For example, substitute *criminals* or *hard decisions* or *great difficulties* in this sentence in place of *tribulations* to see which one fits.

As they moved westward, early pioneers faced many tribulations, such as scarce food, extreme weather, and loneliness.

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*Hint:* When you use context clues to figure out the meaning of a word, actually insert into the sentence the word you think is the answer. For example, substitute *criminals* or *hard decisions* or *great difficulties* in this sentence in place of *tribulations* to see which one fits.

As they moved westward, early pioneers faced many tribulations, such as scarce food, extreme weather, and loneliness.

As they moved westward, early pioneers faced many **great difficulties**, such as scarce food, extreme weather, and loneliness.

In the item below, the examples are **boldfaced**. Use the examples to help you figure out the meaning of the *italicized* word.

Each of my coworkers has a strange *idiosyncrasy*. For instance, our receptionist **wears only pink**. The mail clerk **always speaks in a whisper**. And my office mate **lives on peanuts and apples**.

*Idiosyncrasy* means

- A.** hidden thought. **B.** unusual goal. **C.** unusual personal trait.



The examples of the coworkers' habits may have helped you realize that *idiosyncrasy* means “unusual personal trait.”

Each of my coworkers has a strange *idiosyncrasy*. For instance, our receptionist wears only pink. The mail clerk always speaks in a whisper. And my office mate lives on peanuts and apples.

*Idiosyncrasy* means

- A. hidden thought.   B. unusual goal  C. unusual personal trait.

Notice the **signal phrase** that introduces the examples.

Each of my coworkers has a strange *idiosyncrasy*.  
**For instance**, our receptionist wears only pink. The  
mail clerk always speaks in a whisper. And my  
office mate lives on peanuts and apples.

## 2 Synonyms

Context clues are often available in the form of a **synonym**: a word that means the same or almost the same as the unknown word.

A synonym may appear anywhere in a passage to provide the same meaning as the unknown word.

Look again at this sentence you saw earlier.

Smartphones have become *ubiquitous*; you can see them—and hear them—everywhere.

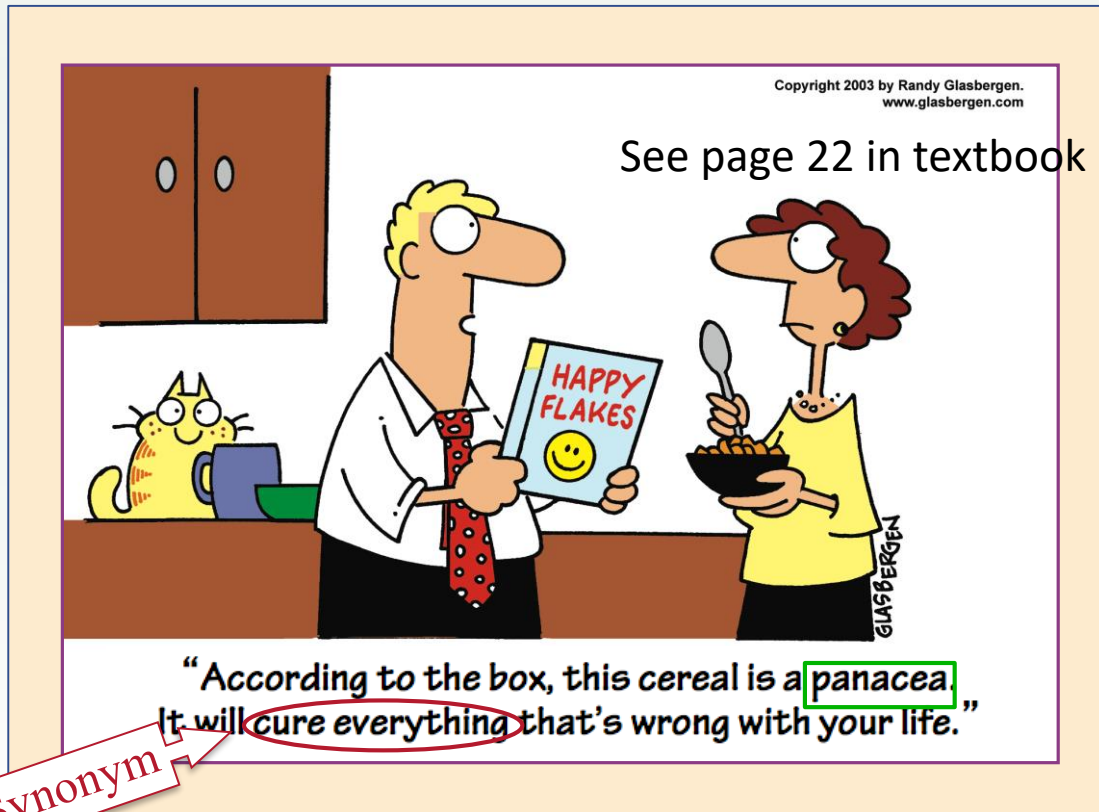
Smartphones have become *ubiquitous*; you can see them—and hear them—*everywhere*.

In this sentence, the **synonym** *everywhere* helped you figure out the meaning of the word *ubiquitous*.

In the cartoon below, what two words help you understand the meaning of the word *panacea*?



## Types of Context Clues / 2 Synonyms



The **synonym** that helps you understand the meaning of *panacea* is *cure everything*.

In the sentence below, what words tell you the meaning of the word *mentor*?

Gaining a *mentor* is helpful when you are beginning a new job. A wise and trusted adviser can greatly assist your career.





Gaining a mentor is helpful when you are beginning a new job. A wise and trusted advisor can greatly assist your career.

The words *wise and trusted advisor* tell you the meaning of *mentor*.

Gaining a mentor is helpful when you are beginning a new job. A wise and trusted adviser can greatly assist your career.

The words *wise and trusted adviser* are a **synonym** for *mentor*.

### 3 Antonyms

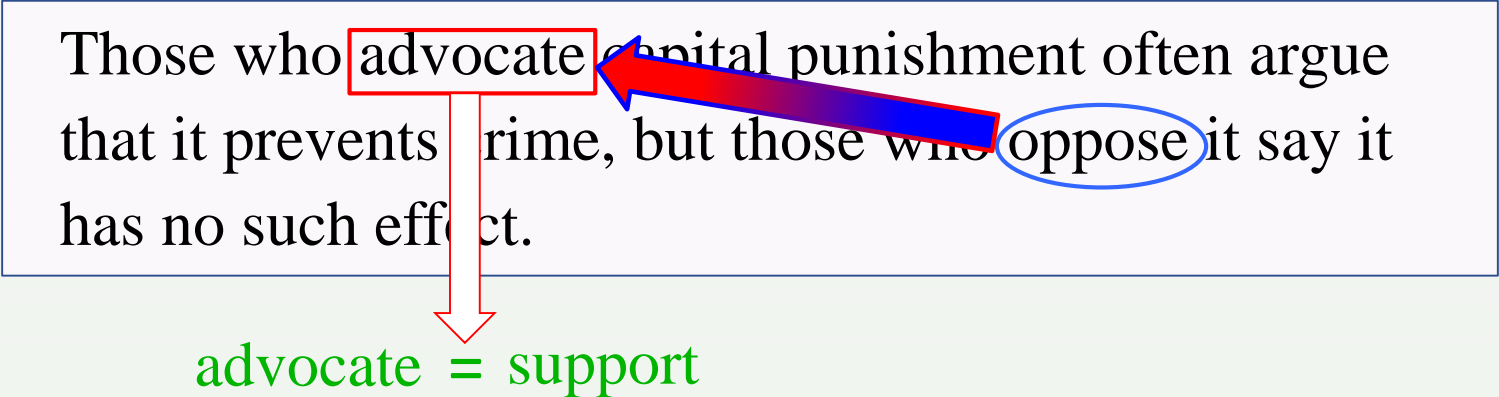
An **antonym**—a word that means the opposite of another word—is also a useful context clue.

Antonyms are sometimes signaled by words and phrases such as *however*, *but*, *yet*, *on the other hand*, and *in contrast*.

Those who advocate capital punishment often argue that it prevents crime, but those who oppose it say it has no such effect.

In the sentence above, the word *oppose* is an antonym that helps us realize that the word *advocate* means “support.”

Those who **advocate** capital punishment often argue that it prevents crime, but those who **oppose** it say it has no such effect.



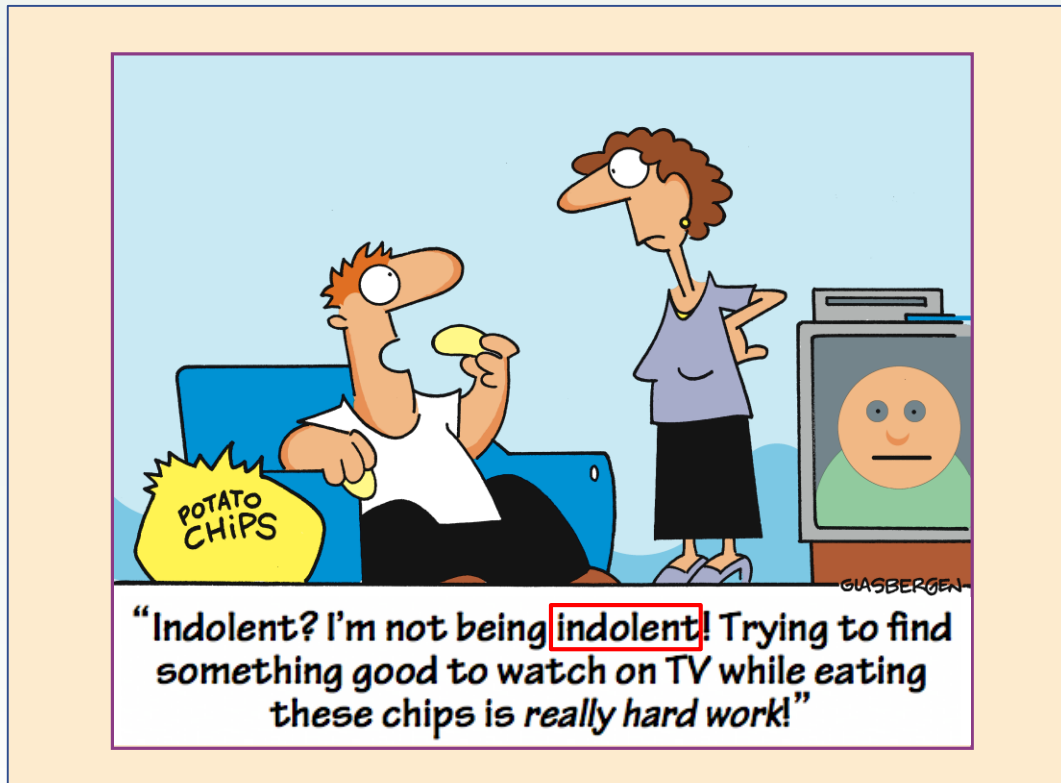
advocate = support

In the sentence above, the word *oppose* is an antonym that helps us realize that the word *advocate* means “support.”

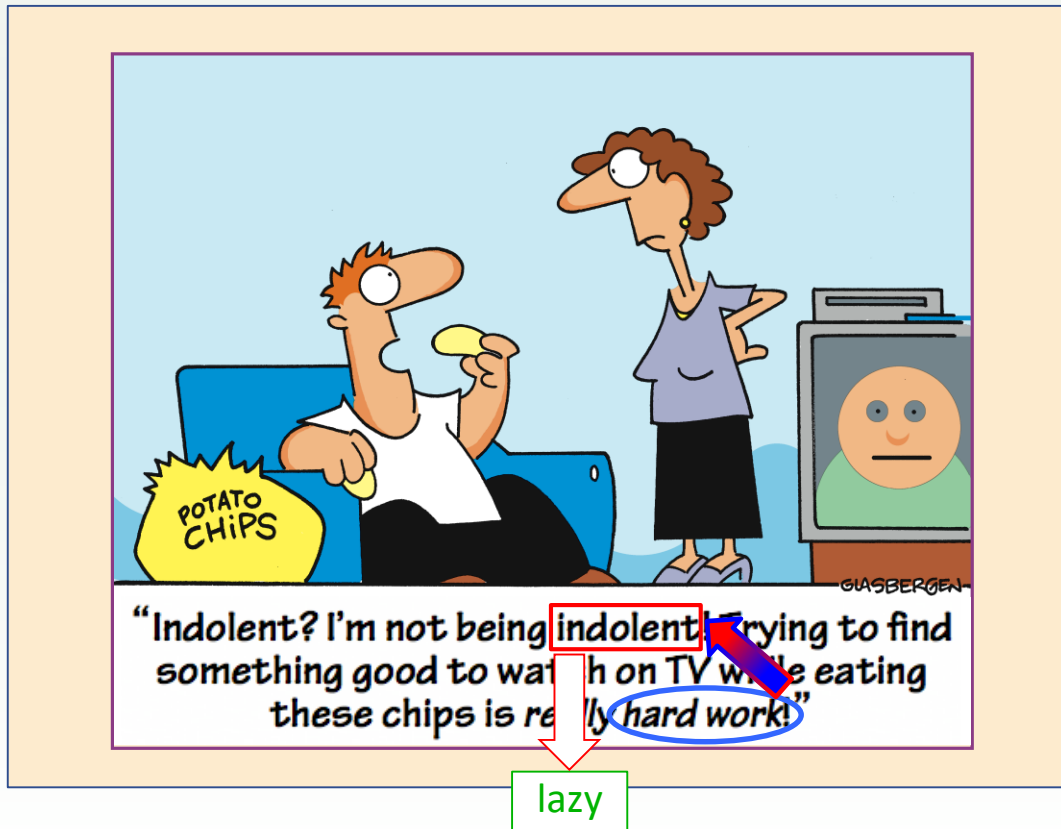
Those who **advocate** capital punishment often argue that it prevents crime, **but** those who **oppose** it say it has no such effect.

Note the word that signals the antonym.

In the cartoon below, what two words help you figure out what the word *indolent* means?



## Types of Context Clues / 3 Antonyms



The **antonym** *hard work* helps you figure out that *indolent* must mean “lazy.”




In the sentence below, pick out the word that means the *opposite* of the italicized word.

The teacher would have achieved better results if she had been as quick to *commend* students for their successes as she was to criticize them for their failures.

The opposite of *commend* is *criticize*.

The teacher would have achieved better results if she had been as quick to *commend* students for their successes as she was to *criticize* them for their failures.



If the opposite of *commend* is *criticize*, what is the meaning of *commend*?

The teacher would have achieved better results if she had been as quick to *commend* students for their successes as she was to *criticize* them for their failures.

*Commend* means

A. blame.

B. praise.

C. grade.

The teacher would have achieved better results if she had been as quick to *commend* students for their successes as she was to *criticize* them for their failures.

*Commend* means

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## 4 General Sense of the Sentence or Passage

Often, the context of a new word contains no examples, synonyms, or antonyms.

In such cases, you must do a bit more detective work; you'll need to look at any clues provided in the information surrounding the word.

Asking yourself questions about the passage may help you make a fairly accurate guess about the meaning of the unfamiliar word.

## Types of Context Clues / 4 General Sense of the Sentence or Passage



Can you figure out the meaning of the word *opportune* in this cartoon?

## Types of Context Clues / 4 General Sense of the Sentence or Passage



To figure out the meaning of *opportune*, try asking this question: Is this a good time for the boss to tell an injured worker that he’s been fired?

## Types of Context Clues / 4 General Sense of the Sentence or Passage



Since the boss realizes that “this may not be the opportune time,” his words to Cranston strongly suggest that *opportune* means “suitable.”



Use the question below the sentence to help you figure out the meaning of the word *diverged*.

Sonya and Liz thought they'd stay good friends forever. But after graduation, their lives *diverged*: Sonya got married, and Liz moved away.

(What relationship did their lives have after graduation?)

*Diverged* means

- A.** came together.      **B.** improved.      **C.** went in different directions.

The sentence provides enough evidence for you to guess that *diverged* means “went in different directions.” If Sonia got married and Liz moved away, their lives went in different directions.

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Sonya and Liz thought they'd stay good friends forever. But after graduation, their lives *diverged*: Sonya got married, and Liz moved away.

**C. went in different directions.**

## **An Important Point about Textbook Definitions**

Very often, textbook authors provide definitions of important terms. They usually follow a definition with one or more examples to ensure that you understand the word being defined.

## Types of Context Clues / An Important Point about Textbook Definitions

In the passage below, the author has included **terms** and **definitions**.

In all societies there is some vertical mobility—moving up or down the status ladder. The upward movement is called upward mobility and the downward movement, downward mobility. The promotion of a teacher to position of principal is an example of upward mobility, and demotion from principal to teacher is downward mobility.

Definition

Term

Term

Term

Definition

Definition

## Types of Context Clues / An Important Point about Textbook Definitions

In the passage below, the author has included **terms** and **definitions**.  
The author also gives **examples**.

In all societies there is some **vertical mobility**—moving up or down the status ladder. The upward movement is called upward mobility and the downward movement, downward mobility. The promotion of a teacher to the position of principal is an example of upward mobility, and demotion from principal to teacher is downward mobility.

Example

Example

Textbook authors, then, often do more than provide context clues: they **define** a **term**, set it off in **boldface** or *italic* type, and provide **examples** as well.

In all societies there is some **vertical mobility**—moving up or down the status ladder. The upward movement is called upward mobility and the downward movement, downward mobility. The promotion of a teacher to the position of principal is an example of upward mobility, and demotion from principal to teacher is downward mobility.



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In all societies there is some **vertical mobility**—moving up or down the status ladder. The upward movement is called *upward mobility* and the downward movement, *downward mobility*. The promotion of a teacher to the position of principal is an example of upward mobility, and demotion from principal to teacher is downward mobility.

## Chapter Review

In this chapter, you learned the following:

- To save time when reading, you should try to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words. You can do so by looking at their *context*—the words surrounding them.
- There are four kinds of context clues: **examples** (marked by words like *for example*, *for instance*, *including*, and *such as*); **synonyms** (words that mean the same as unknown words); **antonyms** (words that mean the opposite of unknown words); and **general sense of the sentence** (clues in the sentence or surrounding sentences about what the unknown words might mean).
- Textbook authors typically set off important words in *italic* or **boldface** and define those words for you, often providing examples as well.

The next chapter—Chapter 2—will introduce you to the most important of all comprehension skills: finding the main idea.