

CONTEXTUAL USAGE

One of the difficulties in learning English language is the vocabulary. Although the words may seem simple enough to memorize, the contextual use of these words proves to be quite challenging at times.

Did you ever find yourself in a conversation where you have no idea what the other person is saying? Maybe it's the person at the car repair place using words like 'carburetor' or 'camshaft,' and you just nod your head and wait for the price. Or maybe you're taking a test, and you're supposed to analyze a passage. But there are certain words in the passage you are unable to understand. You have no access to a dictionary. What do you do?

Well, we're not going to teach your car terminology. It's all about determining the meaning of the word by using context. Context refers to the other words and sentences around the word in question.

There are several methods for using context to figure out what words mean. The first is to look and see if the definition of the word is right there. This can also be a restating of the word.

Consider this sentence: 'While planning the party, Reshma was prudent with the guest list, acting with great caution and care not to invite anyone with whom she wouldn't want to jump around in a bounce house.'

What does 'prudent' mean? In this sentence, the definition of the word is right there. Who is being prudent? Reshma. With what? The guest list. You don't need to know what prudent means to figure that out. And how else is Reshma's behaviour with the guest list described? She's acting with great caution and care. So what's the definition of prudent? Acting with great caution and care.

Other times, you'll see examples that help explain the word in question. This is very similar to finding the definition. Look at this sentence: 'Ravi procrastinated to avoid his homework all day, watching TV, playing video games and even writing thank you cards to his grandparents.'

What does 'procrastinate' mean? This time, it's not defined elsewhere in the sentence. But we do have examples of what it means. We know that watching TV, playing video games and writing thank you cards are all forms of procrastination. If Ravi should be doing his homework, but he's doing these other things instead, then procrastination must mean delaying or putting off. Now, those examples helped us figure it out.

WHAT IS CONTEXTUAL PASSAGE?

The contextual passage test in problem solving assessment (PSA) is aimed to assess children's different aspects of written communication of English language that include word spelling, grammar, idioms and phrases, spot the error, one word substitution, sentence improvement, English comprehension etc.

The contextual passage tests evaluate basic spelling, grammar and punctuation. Literacy knowledge and skills are essential to effective communication across all learning areas.

These passage tests focus on the use and knowledge of contextual passage in written Standard British English. These skills are essential for the development of reading and writing. The content of the contextual passage tests particularly complements the writing tests where spelling, grammar and punctuation are explicitly assessed in context. However, students' understanding of contextual passage is also necessary for reading.

Spelling is the functional component of writing. It is somewhat difficult to memorize a lot of words in one go, especially if you are not the best speller on earth. But if you want to learn, and are willing to make a true effort, these tips will help.

Make up creative ways to memorize the words. For example, take the word arithmetic. It sounds fairly hard. Now take the word this way - A-rat-in-the-house-might-eat-the-ice-cream. Take the first letter of each word and you get: "arithmetic." Now, when that caller with the bulky voice yells, "ARITHMETIC!" you'll know exactly what to spell.

The best way to learn English grammar is grammar exercises that contain dialogues, interrogative and statement (or narrative) sentences on everyday topics, thematic texts and narrative stories. This should also include exercises in listening comprehension and speaking, not just in reading and writing. Grammar exercises must help learners not only form correct sentences, but also use them correctly in context in real life situations.

To crack language conventions test in problem solving assessment (PSA) tests, it is important to know about the English phrases and idioms with explanations of meaning, examples of usage and subsequent exercises. Practising phrases and idioms can be done through exercises in listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. Here are some tips on learning phrases and idioms:

1. Read clear precise meanings of idioms with usage examples in several realistic sentences in a good thematic dictionary of English idioms.
2. Make up your own sentences for using idioms in real life situations.

3. Do ready-made exercises from text books in idioms practice. Exercises in idioms practice can include dialogues, narrations (telling stories), thematic texts, questions and answers with idioms in various situations, discussions, talking points and expressing opinions and views on real life topics and issues.

List of common errors in passages:

1. No comma after introductory element
2. Vague pronoun reference
3. No comma in compound sentence
4. Wrong word
5. Wrong/missing endings
6. Wrong or missing prepositions
7. Possessive apostrophe error
8. Tense shift
9. Sentence fragment
10. Wrong tense or verb form
11. Subject-verb agreement
12. Lack of comma in series
13. Pronoun agreement error
14. Unnecessary comma

In order to keep you updated, we are providing with some exercises which may prove to be a perfect guide that will help students score well in the test. The examples given here will also provide deep insight into the critical elements of the test - Language Conventions. These exercises will also provide theoretical inputs along with practice exercises. These practice exercises will help students in developing the right temperament to crack this exam. The detailed solutions to the exercises are also provided at the end of the exercises.

(Examples 1 to 8): Read the following passage carefully and select the most suitable option from each list according to the corresponding number in the passage.

There is hardly a thing or commodity whose price has not gone up in the recent times. Rise in prices has become a common feature in India and the people are reconciled to this fact. Rise in prices is called inflation. There are various factors that contribute to this rise in prices. Some are natural factors like unfavourable weather conditions which affect the food production and lead to the shortage of commodities in the market. With more money chasing fewer goods, the prices take to the wings.

1. Which of the following could replace 'hardly' as used in the passage above?
(a) and (b) also
(c) scarcely (d) never
2. Which of the following is the correct spelling of 'commoddity'?
(a) commoddity (b) commudity
(c) commodety (d) commodity
3. Which of the following could replace 'reconciled to' as used in the passage above? (a) come in handy
(a) come in handy (b) gone with the wind
(c) come to terms (d) come forward
4. Which of the following is the opposite in meaning to 'inflation' as used in the passage above?
(a) deflation (b) rising prices
(c) pomposity (d) pretentiousness
5. Which of the following could replace 'various' as used in the passage above?
(a) little (b) several
(c) few (d) a few

6. Which of the following could replace 'contribute' as used in the passage above?
 (a) deter (b) warn
 (c) dissuade (d) add
7. Which of the following could replace 'unfavourable' as used in the passage above?
 (a) popular (b) settled
 (c) liveable (d) not favourable
8. Which of the following could replace 'take to the wings' as used in the passage above?
 (a) arise (b) decrease
 (c) fall (d) grow

While solving this problem, let's take question 1 and you have to find out a replacement to the word hardly. If you use a Mt of common sense, you'll see that all the three options -and', 'also' and 'never' are nowhere near the meaning of 'hardly'. Hence, only 'scarcely fits in here which means 'almost not' and even hardly expresses the same meaning which is 'almost not'.

Now take the question 2. The word 'commodity' is wrongly spelt here and if you check all the four spellings you will find that the spelling of option no. 4 is not unusual, not strange and so, that can be your correct answer. Now come to the question 3, if you go through each option one by_ one you'll notice that come in handy' means be useful for a certain purpose, 'gone with the wind' is just a 1939 Hollywood movie which has no relevance here. Option no. 4 'come forward' means to offer help to someone or offer to do something. So you are left with only one option which is 'come to terms' which means 'to accept an unpleasant or sad situation and no longer feel upset or angry about it' and that's the right answer. In the same manner, you can solve rest of the problems with accuracy and correctness.

Key to questions:

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|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. (c) Scoreely | 2. (d) commodity |
| 3. (c) come to terms | 4. (a) deflation |
| 5. (b) several | 6. (d) add |
| 7. (d) not favourable | 8. (a) arise |

EXAMPLES

(Questions 1 to 8): Read the following passage carefully and select the most suitable option from each list according to the corresponding number in the passage.

For Kaku, Mathematics was extremely hard to understand. In order to keep his results high enough to succeed and to satisfy his parents, Kaku attempted a number of strategies. The answer though was simple. He had to work constantly and dilajently at applying the different formulas to a range of contexts. Often he was envious of his peers to whom comprehension came easily. However, at the end of the year, it seemed his relentless work was rewarded when his results put him amongst the leading scholars of his class.

1. Which of these would be the best word to use to replace the word 'extremely' as it is used in the passage above?
 (a) vastly (b) mostly
 (c) especially (d) massively
2. Which of these is closest in meaning to 'strategies' as used in the passage above?
 (a) rules (b) questions
 (c) approaches (d) instructions
3. Which of the following could replace 'answer' as used in the passage above?
 (a) reply (b) puzzle
 (c) solution (d) explanation
4. Which of the following could replace 'though' as used in the passage above?
 (a) yet (b) even so
 (c) however (d) all the same

5. Which of the following is the correct way to spell 'diligently'?
- (a) dilajently (b) diligently
(c) dilejently (d) diligently
6. Which of these is closest in meaning to 'contexts' as used in the passage above?
- (a) ways (b) settings
(c) numbers (d) situations
7. Which of the following is closest in meaning to 'was envious of' as used in the passage above?
- (a) was jealous of (b) was resentful of
(c) was bitter towards (d) was hostile towards
8. Which of the following is the opposite in meaning to 'reward' as used in the passage above?
- (a) forfeited (b) punished
(c) penalised (d) disadvantaged

Key to questions:

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| 1. (c) especially | 2. (c) approaches |
| 3. (c) solution | 4. (c) however |
| 5. (b) diligently | 6. (d) situations |
| 7. (a) was jealous of | 8. (b) punished |

Tips on how to do the language conventions test

- Students will go through the text slowly without using any of the options. Read it two or three times until you have a clear perspective of what the passage is all about.
- Next students are advised to go through all the 4 options one by one. Just identify which optional words are the most misleading, out of context and irrelevant to the passage. Go through the text once again and try to choose the correct word from the rest of options that are left after eliminating two or three options.
- While finalizing the correct word, you will be able to eliminate all the three obvious false words and now you zero in on the correct answer.