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# Working Out New Words When Reading

KS3 ENGLISH

Ages 11-14 ⌚ 4 min read

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## Why New Words Matter

Every time you read, you'll bump into **unfamiliar words**. Instead of stopping to look them up in a dictionary every single time, you can actually work out what they mean yourself! This skill makes you a better reader and helps your vocabulary grow naturally.

## Use Context Clues

The words around an unfamiliar word give you **context clues**. These are hints that help you guess the meaning. If you read "The **resilient** plant survived the storm," the fact that it survived tells you resilient means something like strong or able to bounce back.

Think of it like seeing footprints in the snow—even if you didn't see the person, the prints around you tell a story about what happened.

## Break Words Into Parts

Many words are made from smaller pieces called **prefixes**, **roots**, and **suffixes**. If you know that "un-" means not, and "-happy" is a feeling, then "unhappy" makes sense. Learning common word parts is like learning a code that unlocks hundreds of words.

For example, "unhelpful" = un (not) + helpful. "Reread" = re (again) + read.

"Enjoyment" = enjoy + ment (the state of).

## Look for Examples

Sometimes writers give you an **example** of what they mean. If a sentence says "The **fauna**—like lions, zebras, and giraffes—roamed the savanna," the examples show you that fauna means animals.

Think of it like someone showing you pictures instead of describing something—the pictures tell you instantly what it means.

## Check the Sentence Structure

Pay attention to **punctuation** and **sentence structure**. If there's a dash, comma, or "is" nearby, the writer might be explaining the word. "The **nocturnal** creature, a bat, hunted at night" shows you that nocturnal relates to nighttime.

## When to Use a Dictionary

After you've tried these tricks, if you still can't figure it out, then grab a dictionary or ask an adult. But you'll be surprised how often these strategies work! The more you practice, the easier it gets.