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# TOEFL

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## Reading Skills 1 and 2

### UNDERSTANDING VOCABULARY FROM CONTEXT; PARAPHRASING A SENTENCE

#### Reading Skill 1: Understanding Vocabulary from Context

Vocabulary questions in the reading section test your ability to figure out the meaning of a word you don't know. Therefore, do not worry if you don't already know the word! There will be clues in the passage to help you guess its meaning. Check the other words in the sentence and also the sentences just before and after the one with the **highlighted** word.

Some words in English have several meanings. Even if you are already familiar with one meaning of the word, check the sentence carefully to see which meaning is appropriate for that passage. Pay attention to the part of speech (i.e., noun, verb, adjective, or adverb).

- The *cast* of the play was comprised of only male actors. (*cast* = noun, meaning the group of players who act in a theatrical production)
- The fisherman on the boat *cast* his nets into the water. (*cast* = verb, meaning “to throw”)

#### EXPRESS TIP



One type of common clue is a contrast clue, which shows the unknown word in contrast to a more familiar word. Check for words and phrases such as *unlike*, *instead of*, and *on the other hand*.

*Rats are active at night. The mongoose, on the other hand, is diurnal. (diurnal = “awake and active during the day”)*

The vocabulary questions will ask you about the word directly, and show you where to find it by highlighting it in the passage:

- The phrase **on the clock** in the passage is **closest in meaning to ...**
- The word **unseemly** in the passage could **best be replaced by ...**

The correct answer will be a synonym (or phrase) for the word (or expression) that could be used in the same place in the passage.

#### EXPRESS TIP



After you have selected an answer, mentally put it into the sentence, and “read” the sentence with your replacement to double-check that it makes sense.

*You must wear your uniform as long as you are on the clock. = “at work”*

*You must wear your uniform as long as you are at work. ✓*

Look at this example of a vocabulary question on a computer screen.

**EXAMPLE:** Understanding Vocabulary from Context Question

**TOEFL Reading**

Review Volume Help Back Next

Question 1 of 10 Hide Time 00:54:00

1. The word **pseudonym** in the passage is closest in meaning to

- false name
- married name
- nickname
- middle name

**Agatha Christie**

1 Agatha Christie is perhaps the best-known writer of mystery and detective novels in the English language. In fact, she is the best-selling writer of books of all time. She wrote romances using the **pseudonym** Mary Westmacott, and an autobiographical account of her travels with her archaeologist husband using her married name, Agatha Christie Mallowan. However, it is her mystery and detective novels, short stories, and plays for which she is most famous.

**SKILL BUILDER**

**Directions:** Work with a partner. Read the paragraph and the questions. Discuss the clues in the paragraph that tell you the answers. Circle the contrast word in the paragraph that helps you figure out the answer to #2. Then mark the correct answers.

**Agatha Christie**

- 1 Agatha Christie is perhaps the best-known writer of mystery and detective novels in the English language. In fact, she is the best-selling writer of books of all time. She wrote romances using the **pseudonym** Mary Westmacott, and an autobiographical account of her travels with her archaeologist husband using her married name, Agatha Christie Mallowan. However, it is her mystery and detective novels, short stories, and plays for which she is most famous.
- 2 Agatha was painfully shy as a child. Perhaps as result of this, her mother decided that she would not receive a **formal** education, but would instead be taught at home. She taught herself to read by age five, and had lessons from part-time tutors. She was interested in the arts from a young age, first music and then story telling and writing. At age 16, she was sent to Paris to study singing and piano. However, because of her shyness, she never became a performing musician. Perhaps her shyness is partly to thank for her choice of writing as her favorite form of artistic expression as an adult.

1. The word **pseudonym** in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to
  - A. false name
  - B. married name
  - C. nickname
  - D. middle name
2. The word **formal** in paragraph 2 could best be replaced by
  - A. expensive
  - B. fancy
  - C. traditional
  - D. free



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