Context Clues

Use this key to check answers and read the explanations.

1. Lio carried a compact umbrella, so small when closed that it fit into his coat pocket. What does compact mean here?

A. Small and able to fit in a tight space
B. Extremely heavy
C. Made for several people
D. Hard to fold

Correct answer: A. Small and able to fit in a tight space
The pocket detail shows that the folded umbrella takes up little space.

2. The stage crew will improvise, making up a new sound effect without a rehearsal. What does improvise mean?

A. Ask the audience to be silent
B. Repeat an old recording exactly
C. Create something on the spot
D. Practice a scene for several weeks

Correct answer: C. Create something on the spot
The phrase about making up the effect without a rehearsal restates the meaning.

3. Ken expected a crowded trail. The path was deserted, with no other walkers in sight. What does deserted mean here?

A. Very sunny
B. Empty of people
C. Marked by signs
D. Paved recently

Correct answer: B. Empty of people
The trail has no walkers, which contrasts with Ken’s expectation of a crowd.

4. Every fragile object, including the thin glass vase and the cracked clay cup, went into a padded box. What does fragile mean?

A. Full of water
B. Very expensive
C. Already repaired
D. Easily damaged or broken

Correct answer: D. Easily damaged or broken
The thin vase, cracked cup, and care in packing point to objects that could break easily.

5. The signs were legible. Mina could read every word even from the far end of the room. What does legible mean?

A. Written in two languages
B. Clear enough to read
C. Hung above a doorway
D. Difficult to spell

Correct answer: B. Clear enough to read
Mina can read the words from far away, so the writing is clear.

6. Rae was meticulous about the display. She measured the spacing twice and moved one label by a few millimeters. Which detail best supports the meaning of meticulous?

A. She measured twice and corrected a very small difference.
B. The display had labels.
C. Rae worked near a wall.
D. She had a place to stand.

Correct answer: A. She measured twice and corrected a very small difference.
The repeated measurement and tiny adjustment both show careful attention to detail.

7. Moss was sparse on the steps, appearing in only a few patches. What does sparse mean here?

A. Completely gone
B. Slippery to walk on
C. Thickly layered
D. Thinly scattered

Correct answer: D. Thinly scattered
The few isolated patches show that the moss is spread out and limited.

8. The first draft made three promises. When asked to qualify the last one, the author added the words if the weather allows. What does qualify mean here?

A. Remove all punctuation
B. Meet the requirements for a prize
C. Add a condition or limit
D. Make the promise more certain

Correct answer: C. Add a condition or limit
The new phrase limits when the promise applies. That is the meaning that fits this use of qualify.

9. A team needs portable equipment, meaning equipment that can be moved easily, for its outdoor concert. What kind of clue explains portable?

A. A definition in the same sentence
B. A list of opposites
C. A later event with no explanation
D. The spelling of a proper name

Correct answer: A. A definition in the same sentence
The phrase introduced by meaning gives a direct definition.

10. Teo’s explanation was ambiguous. Two teammates read it and reached different conclusions about where to meet. What does ambiguous mean?

A. Delivered too late to read
B. Completely false
C. Written in very small letters
D. Open to more than one interpretation

Correct answer: D. Open to more than one interpretation
The two different conclusions show that the explanation could be understood in more than one way.

11. A mechanic heard a faint click at first. As the machine warmed, the click became loud enough to hear across the shop. Which meaning of faint fits the first sentence?

A. Brave
B. Unconscious
C. Barely noticeable
D. Unlikely to happen

Correct answer: C. Barely noticeable
The contrast with the much louder sound shows that the early click was hard to hear.

12. The town tried a tentative schedule for one Saturday. It asked for feedback before deciding whether to keep the schedule. What does tentative mean here?

A. Required forever
B. Provisional and subject to change
C. Already rejected by everyone
D. Copied exactly from last year

Correct answer: B. Provisional and subject to change
The schedule is being tried before a final decision, so it may change.

13. A notice calls the original trail inaccessible. It says a fallen tree blocks the entrance and directs hikers to a nearby route. Which meaning is most supported?

A. Open only in the morning
B. Too expensive to use
C. Missing from every map
D. Unable to be entered through the usual route

Correct answer: D. Unable to be entered through the usual route
The blocked entrance is the relevant clue. The notice explains why hikers have to use another route.

14. Nina kept returning to the project schedule when the group got distracted. The schedule was her anchor during a hectic week. What does anchor mean here?

A. Something that gives stability
B. A metal object tied to a boat
C. A weight Nina carried in her bag
D. A way to postpone a decision

Correct answer: A. Something that gives stability
The schedule keeps the group steady and focused. This use applies the idea of an anchor to a plan.

15. At first, a student thinks the word reserved means booked. Later a narrator says Ada seldom offered an opinion until asked and describes her as reserved. What does the later context show?

A. Reserved means Ada spoke before everyone else.
B. Reserved means Ada paid ahead for a seat.
C. Reserved describes someone who keeps thoughts to herself.
D. Reserved means Ada had the only correct opinion.

Correct answer: C. Reserved describes someone who keeps thoughts to herself.
Ada’s habit of waiting to speak supports a meaning about her manner. The meaning about advance booking does not fit that description.