

Official SAT Practice

Lesson Plans

for Teachers by Teachers

LESSON 3

Reading—Word Choice and Words in Context

Subscore: Words in Context

Focus: Determining the meaning of words and phrases in context and examining word choice

Objectives:

Students will

- determine the meanings of words and phrases in context.
- determine how the selection of words and phrases shapes meaning and tone in text.

Before the Lesson:

- Review Chapter 4 in the *SAT® Study Guide for Students*.
- Review the “Understanding Your Words in Context Subscore” article at <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat/new-sat-tips-planning/new-sat-about-sat/a/what-does-the-words-in-context-subscore-measure>.
- Preview and print (if necessary) the student materials.

Introductory Activity | 15 minutes

1. Let students know that in previous lessons, they have explored the meaning and perspective of texts and today they will focus on the most important tool that writers have to communicate those meanings and perspectives: **word choice**.
2. To illustrate the importance of diction, or word choice, ask students about the similarities and differences between the words “house” and “home.” Both have the same literal meaning: a residence in which one lives, but think about the connotation—emotional associations—of the word “home,” which can bring up images of safety, security, and connection way beyond the word “house.”
3. Ask students to play around with words that have powerful emotional, connotative associations for the following more generic words: attractive, angry, friendly, happy, sad, smart, and so on. Discuss how the words with emotional connotation can communicate very specific points of view and tone.
4. Direct students to look back at the beginning of the passage they may have read in Lesson 2 from Congresswoman Barbara Jordan discussing the impeachment process. Point out some specific word choices with strong connotative associations: *inquisitor*, *solemnness*, *idle spectator*, *destruction*. Discuss how these particular word choices are intended to create specific reactions from her audience. Possible rhetorical effects are asked about in Question 5.

Rationale for #5:

Explanation: Choice A is the best answer because the quoted phrases—building from “diminution” to “subversion” to “destruction”—suggest the increasing seriousness of the threat Jordan sees to the Constitution.

5. The second way that word choice will be assessed on the SAT Reading Test will require students to figure out the precise meaning of a given word or phrase based on how it’s used in a particular passage, often called **words in context**. Ask students to think about the word “intense,” which is likely one that they have heard and even used many times before. Ask them to share sentences that use the word properly. Then, ask students to read the next passage in their materials and discuss how the word “intense” is used in the excerpt and how it is similar or different to the uses they have had experience with.
6. Then, ask students to think about the best answer to Question 2, and discuss the rationale, taking the time to explain why the other common usages of the word do not apply here.

Rationale #2:

Explanation: Choice B is the best answer because the context makes clear that the clustering of jobs, innovation, and productivity will be more concentrated in, or more densely packed into, “a smaller number of bigger cities and city-regions” (lines 53–54).

Choice A is not the best answer because although “intense” sometimes means “emotional,” it would make no sense in this context to say that the clustering of jobs, innovation, and productivity will be more emotional in “a smaller number of bigger cities and city-regions” (lines 53–54).

Choice C is not the best answer because although “intense” sometimes means “brilliant,” it would make no sense in this context to say that the clustering of jobs, innovation, and productivity will be more brilliant in “a smaller number of bigger cities and city-regions” (lines 53–54).

Choice D is not the best answer because although “intense” sometimes means “determined,” it would make no sense in this context to say that the clustering of jobs, innovation, and productivity will be more determined in “a smaller number of bigger cities and city-regions” (lines 53–54).

7. Summarize for students that there are two ways that they will examine words on the SAT and throughout this lesson: words in context (like the “intense” example), and the rhetorical effect of word choice (as in the Barbara Jordan excerpt).

Group/Pair Discussion/Activity | 15 minutes

1. Ask students to read the excerpt from the novel *Emma* by Jane Austen. As they read, they should annotate the text specifically for word choice: words that express specific emotions and words that might have multiple meanings.
2. After reading, students should make a list of at least 8–10 words and phrases used to describe Emma Woodhouse. From these words, what conclusions can they draw about the narrator’s attitude toward Emma?
3. Next, ask students to look at Questions 5 and 6, both of which ask about words in context. In addition to discussing the likely answers, students should consider why the other meanings of those words are not appropriate in this context. Share the rationales as needed.

Rationale #5:

Choice C is the best answer. In lines 25–27, Emma’s situation is described as “doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor’s judgment, but directed chiefly by her own.” In other words, Emma respects Miss Taylor’s opinion but makes decisions directed, or guided, primarily by her own opinion. Choices A, B, and D are incorrect because lines 25–27 emphasize that in “doing what she liked” Emma was directed, or guided, by her own opinion. Emma’s opinion is not trained by, aimed at, or addressed by anyone else.

Rationale #6:

Choice B is the best answer. Lines 53–55 describe how Emma felt a loss after Miss Taylor married and moved out of Emma’s home: “but it was a black morning’s work for her. The want of Miss Taylor would be felt every hour of every day.” In this context, “want” means “lack.” Choices A, C, and D are incorrect because in this context “want” does not mean desire, requirement, or request.

4. Ask students to look back at other words they marked that might have multiple meanings depending on the context. Share these with the class.

Individual Application | 10 minutes

1. Ask students to read the last two excerpts in their materials for this lesson. Students should annotate words or phrases that might be asked about on the SAT.
2. Students should answer Questions 11 and 23, which focus on word choice. Review the rationale as needed.

Rationale #11:

Explanation: Choice C is the best answer because the context makes clear that Nichols followed Adelita’s “epic journey with a satellite tag” (lines 3–4).

Choice A is not the best answer because while “tracked” sometimes means “searched for,” it would make little sense in this context to say that Nichols searched for Adelita’s “epic journey with a satellite tag” (lines 3–4). It is more reasonable to conclude from the passage that Nichols knew about Adelita and her journey and used a satellite tag to help follow it.

Choice B is not the best answer because while “tracked” sometimes means “traveled over,” it would make no sense in this context to say that Nichols traveled over Adelita’s “epic journey with a satellite tag” (lines 3–4).

Choice D is not the best answer because while “tracked” sometimes means “hunted,” it would make no sense in this context to say that Nichols hunted Adelita’s “epic journey with a satellite tag” (lines 3–4).

Rationale #23:

Choice B is the best answer. In lines 10–18 the molecular biologist Matthew Andrews explains how fat is important to hibernating animals, stating “Fat is where it’s at” and “You bring your own lunch with you.” The use of this non-scientific language creates a conversational tone that allows readers to understand what might otherwise be a complex topic. Choices A, C, and D are incorrect because Andrews’s phrases, such as “Fat is where it’s at,” are relaxed rather than bleak, ominous, or absurd.

3. Ask students to evaluate their current ability to analyze words in context and word choice for rhetorical effects.

Homework | 20 minutes

- As students continue to practice on Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy®, they should make note of the questions that ask about words in context and word choice. Note: they will see at least two in every Reading passage. You may want to ask students to save a screenshot of some of those questions or copy the questions for discussion the next day.
- Ask students to make a note of their skill level in each Reading area. This is displayed in the crescent shape next to each content area. Skill level corresponds to the level of text complexity of the passages. As students successfully complete questions they will be able to “level up” to the next level of text complexity.
- Students may also want to read “Understanding Your Words in Context Subscore” in the Tips and Strategies tab.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat/new-sat-tips-planning/new-sat-about-sat/a/what-does-the-words-in-context-subscore-measure>

Student Materials—Lesson 3

Introductory Activity

Today, I am an inquisitor. An hyperbole would not be fictional and would not overstate the solemnness that I feel right now. My faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction, of the Constitution.

9

The main rhetorical effect of the series of three phrases in lines 5-6 (the diminution, the subversion, the destruction) is to

- A) convey with increasing intensity the seriousness of the threat Jordan sees to the Constitution.
- B) clarify that Jordan believes the Constitution was first weakened, then sabotaged, then broken.
- C) indicate that Jordan thinks the Constitution is prone to failure in three distinct ways.
- D) propose a three-part agenda for rescuing the Constitution from the current crisis.

[. . .] The coming decades will likely see more intense clustering of jobs, innovation, and productivity in a smaller number of bigger cities and cityregions. Some regions could end up bloated beyond the capacity of their infrastructure, while others struggle, their promise stymied by inadequate human or other resources.

Adapted from Richard Florida, *The Great Reset*. ©2010 by Richard Florida.

2

As used in line 52, “intense” most nearly means

- A) emotional.
- B) concentrated.
- C) brilliant.
- D) determined.

Pair/Group Activity

This passage is adapted from Jane Austen, *Emma*, originally published in 1815.

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of Line
5 existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

She was the youngest of the two daughters of a most affectionate, indulgent father, and had, in consequence of her sister's marriage, been mistress of his house from a very early period.

10 Her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses, and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection.

15 Sixteen years had Miss Taylor been in Mr. Woodhouse's family, less as a governess than a friend, very fond of both daughters, but particularly of Emma. Between them it was more the intimacy of sisters. Even before Miss Taylor
20 had ceased to hold the nominal office of governess, the mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint; and the shadow of authority being now long passed away, they had been living together as friend and
25 friend very mutually attached, and Emma doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment, but directed chiefly by her own.

The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way,
30 and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened

alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her.

35 Sorrow came—a gentle sorrow—but not at all in the shape of any disagreeable consciousness.—Miss Taylor married. It was Miss Taylor's loss which first brought grief. It was on the wedding-day of this beloved friend that Emma

40 first sat in mournful thought of any continuance. The wedding over and the bride-people gone, her father and herself were left to dine together, with no prospect of a third to cheer a long evening. Her father composed himself to sleep after
45 dinner, as usual, and she had then only to sit and think of what she had lost.

The event had every promise of happiness for her friend. Mr. Weston was a man of unexceptionable character, easy fortune, suitable
50 age and pleasant manners; and there was some satisfaction in considering with what self-denying, generous friendship she had always wished and promoted the match; but it was a black morning's work for her. The want of Miss
55 Taylor would be felt every hour of every day. She recalled her past kindness—the kindness, the affection of sixteen years—how she had taught and how she had played with her from five years old—how she had devoted all her powers to attach
60 and amuse her in health—and how nursed her through the various illnesses of childhood. A large

5

As used in line 26, “directed” most nearly means

- A) trained.
- B) aimed.
- C) guided.
- D) addressed.

6

As used in line 54, “want” most nearly means

- A) desire.
- B) lack.
- C) requirement.
- D) request.

Individual Practice

This passage is adapted from Ed Yong, “Turtles Use the Earth’s Magnetic Field as Global GPS.” ©2011 by Kalmbach Publishing Co.

In 1996, a loggerhead turtle called Adelita swam across 9,000 miles from Mexico to Japan, crossing the entire Pacific on her way. Wallace J. Nichols tracked this epic journey with a satellite tag. But Adelita herself had no such technology at her disposal. How did she steer a route across two oceans to find her destination?

Line
5

Nathan Putman has the answer. By testing hatchling turtles in a special tank, he has found that they can use the Earth’s magnetic field as their own Global Positioning System

11

As used in line 3, “tracked” most nearly means

- A) searched for.
- B) traveled over.
- C) followed.
- D) hunted.

This passage is adapted from Tina Hesman Saey, “Lessons from the Torpid.” ©2012 by Society for Science & the Public.

Understanding how hibernators, including ground squirrels, marmots and bears, survive their long winter’s naps may one day offer solutions for

Line problems such as heart disease, osteoporosis and
5 muscular dystrophy.

Nearly everything about the way an animal’s body works changes when it hibernates, and preparations start weeks or months in advance. The first order of business is to fatten up.

10 “Fat is where it’s at for a hibernator,” says Matthew Andrews, a molecular biologist at the University of Minnesota Duluth who studies 13-lined ground squirrels. “You bring your own lunch with you.” Packing lunch is necessary because the animals
15 go on the world’s strictest diet during the winter, surviving entirely off their white fat. “They have their last supper in October; they don’t eat again until March,” Andrews says.

23

What main effect do the quotations by Andrews in lines 10-18 have on the tone of the passage?

- A) They create a bleak tone, focusing on the difficulties hibernators face during the winter.
- B) They create a conversational tone, relating scientific information in everyday language.
- C) They create an ominous tone, foreshadowing the dire results of Andrews’s research.
- D) They create an absurd tone, using images of animals acting as if they were human.