Words in context: meaning, polarity and collocation

Original skill preparation; versioned source scope

Words in Context: Meaning, Tone and Collocation

- Find the **word in context 语境中的词义**: the meaning a word has in this sentence.
- Use clues to decide the **contextual meaning 语境义**, including positive or negative tone.
- Recognise **collocation 词语搭配**, the words that naturally go together.
- Notice **connotation 内涵意义**, the feeling a word carries.

Predict before you look

- Cover the word and say what the sentence needs, in simple words.
- Use clues nearby: an example, a contrast ("but", "although"), a cause ("because"), or a restatement after a colon.
- Then choose the option closest to your prediction.

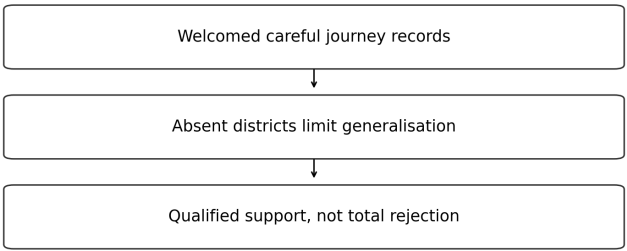
Tone and connotation

- Decide whether the context is positive, negative or neutral. "Welcomed" is positive; "cautioned" signals concern.
- Two words can share a meaning but differ in feeling: "thrifty" is positive; "stingy" is negative.
- An option with the right meaning but the wrong tone is wrong.

Common words with uncommon meanings

- The SAT often uses everyday words in a less common sense: "qualified" can mean limited; "reservation" can mean a doubt; "check" can mean stop.
- Test the familiar meaning in the sentence; if it does not fit, look for another.
- Collocation helps: we give "qualified support" and "express a reservation".

Figure: Common words with uncommon meanings



- Worked steps: Welcomed careful journey records → Absent districts limit generalisation → Qualified support, not total rejection
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

Practice passage

- **Passage.** The reviewers welcomed the survey's careful record of individual journeys, but they gave its city-wide conclusions only qualified support.
- The routes had been chosen for convenience, and several districts were absent.
- One reviewer called the record illuminating: it made previously overlooked travel difficulties easier to understand.
- Another cautioned that extending the conclusions would require a broader sample.

Worked example: three words

- "Qualified": limited, conditional. Clue: the routes were convenient and districts were missing.
- "Illuminating": making something clearer. Clue: the colon, then "easier to understand".
- "Reservation": a doubt or concern. Clue: it refers back to the caution about extending conclusions; it is not a booked seat.

Worked example: testing replacements

- *Revealing* keeps the meaning: the record makes difficulties understood.
- *Dazzling* adds admiration and brilliance that the passage does not express.
- *Visible* means "able to be seen", not "explaining". So *revealing* is best here. The others are not always wrong, only wrong in this sentence.

Common errors

- Choosing the most familiar meaning of the word.
- Ignoring a contrast word such as "but".
- Picking a word with the right meaning but the wrong tone.

Common errors (2)

- Choosing a word that does not collocate with the words around it.
- Deciding before reading the whole sentence.

Key terms

- **word in context**: The meaning a word has in a particular sentence.
- **contextual meaning**: The sense a word takes from the words around it.
- **collocation**: A pair or group of words that are often used together.
- **connotation**: The feeling or attitude a word suggests beyond its basic meaning.

Check yourself

- "The new rule will check the spread of the weed." What does "check" mean?
- Which is more positive about a careful spender: "frugal" or "miserly"?
- "Her account of the trip was spare: only dates and places." What does "spare" mean here?