

It's best not to interrupt your reading to look up every unfamiliar word right away in the dictionary. Mark unfamiliar words (with a penciled mark, not with anything permanent), then try these tactics for making an "educated guess" at the meaning as you go.

1. **SOUND** it out. Use simple phonics to attempt saying the word—try a couple of ways. You might recognize the word when you hear it.
2. **Examine the STRUCTURE.** Look for familiar word parts and see if you can tell how the prefixes and suffixes shape the root meaning.
3. **Look at the CONTEXT.** Guess at the word's meaning from the way it is used in the sentence. You may find that an informal definition is worked in somewhere nearby. Or maybe you will see the meaning reflected in the next idea, or just be able to tell the meaning by the way the passage continues.
4. **Check the DICTIONARY.** If you can't understand what you're reading after using the above steps, pause and turn to the dictionary or the textbook's glossary list. When you find your word, skim through the whole entry and find the most relevant meaning. Check the pronunciation too.
5. **Reinforce your understanding by WRITING** a usable brief definition or synonym in the margin of your reading—in pencil, because you won't always need it there.

You should also use the **dictionary** as a final step even if you have been able to guess well enough to keep going in your reading.

When you stop after a section of reading to make notes, check your understanding of any words that aren't yet crystal-clear. Read the dictionary entry thoroughly—look for analysis of the word's origin and structure and for examples of its usage. Then make a marginal note.

Reviewing the different types of **context clues** and their signals as well as familiarizing yourself with **common prefixes, suffixes** and **root words** will also help you on your way to building a stronger vocabulary.

Further explanation and techniques for Approaching New Words can be found in the following texts:

Langan, John. *Ten Steps to Improving College Reading Skills*, 5th ed. West Berlin: Townsend Press, 2008. (See pages 22-30)

Spears, Deanne. *Improving Reading Skills: Contemporary Readings for College Students*, 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010. (See pages 1-6)