

1

Multi-Meaning Words

In this unit you will:

- look at how a project is structured;
- practice writing evaluatively;
- practice selecting information from books and journals;
- practice selecting information from websites.

Introduction

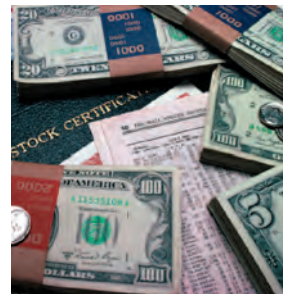
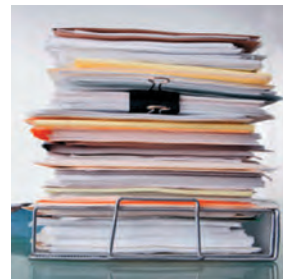
One of the problems with using dictionaries to find the meaning of words is that many words have a number of different meanings. If you select the first meaning you find in the dictionary without thinking about the context in which the word appears, you may choose the wrong definition and misunderstand the text.

Here are some examples of common words with very different meanings:

Word	Meaning
body	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● the physical structure of a person or animal, including the head and limbs● a group of people who are connected through their work or a particular purpose, e.g., "The WHO is an international body concerned with health issues."● a large amount of something, especially something that has been collected, such as knowledge, information, and so on. "There is now a considerable body of evidence to support the theory that life exists in other solar systems."
capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● the city where a country has its main seat of government● money or property used to start a business

Study tip

Keep clear notes of new words in a separate book, as research has shown that good language students keep organized notes.



Task 1: Choosing meaning from context

Many words can only be fully understood in context. This is particularly true for homonyms, i.e., words that have two or more unrelated meanings. The following exercises provide the context of single sentences. When reading at the paragraph level, however, you should also use context beyond the sentence level.

Study tip

A word with two or more unrelated meanings is called a homonym.

1.1 Choose the correct meaning of the words in bold according to the context in which they appear.

Example:

The government gets a lot of revenue from **duty** on tobacco products.

- a) a moral or legal obligation
- b) a task you have to do as part of your job
- c) a tax you pay on goods you buy**



- 1 The questions can be answered in any **order**.
 - a) the arrangement or sequence of a group of things in relation to each other
 - b) a command given by a person in authority
 - c) a request for a product to be delivered to you
- 2 Assignments are taken into consideration in awarding the final grade, so they do **count**.
 - a) to calculate the quantity of things or people there are in a group
 - b) to be valuable or important
 - c) to say numbers in order
- 3 The **nature** of the task will demand a person with a lot of experience in this particular field.
 - a) a combination of qualities or features that define a thing
 - b) the physical world, including all living things and features such as the land, the oceans, and the weather
 - c) the character of a person or animal
- 4 Fatigue is one of the most **common** causes of road accidents.
 - a) frequent
 - b) belonging to or used by a group of people
 - c) ordinary or usual
- 5 The whole **point** of this law is to protect the rights of individuals.
 - a) an idea or opinion that forms part of an argument or discussion
 - b) the aim of or reason for something
 - c) a precise moment in time or in the development of something
- 6 Investing in this company should provide an excellent **return**.
 - a) go back to one place from another place
 - b) profit on money invested
 - c) restarting an activity after not doing it for some time
- 7 Police arrested 15 people in a security **operation** in the capital.
 - a) the process of cutting into a human body for medical purposes
 - b) a business, company or organization
 - c) a planned action for a particular purpose

- 8 There are still numerous one-party **states** around the world.
- a) the condition of a person or thing at a particular time
 - b) a country or nation
 - c) an area within a country that has its own legal and political powers
- 9 Young people today have a greater **degree** of independence than 30 years ago.
- a) an amount of something
 - b) a unit for measuring the size of an angle
 - c) a recognition awarded by a university
- 10 The government plans to **introduce** a system of identity cards.
- a) to bring a plan, product, or system into operation for the first time
 - b) to tell an audience about a performance or speaker they are going to see or hear
 - c) to formally tell people each other's names when they meet for the first time

1.2

Here are ten more words to guess in context. Choose the correct meaning, as in Ex 1.1.

- 1 My brother has strong **views** about the best way to deal with the increase in violent crime.
- a) one's opinions or beliefs about something
 - b) what you are able to see from a particular place
 - c) a picture or photograph of a place
- 2 The **terms** of the contract must be acceptable to both sides.
- a) a word or expression used to refer to something
 - b) the conditions of an agreement
 - c) one of the periods of time that the school or university year is divided into
- 3 It is difficult to disagree with his **argument** that oil has been the main reason for a number of recent military conflicts.
- a) a dispute between two or more people, usually angry
 - b) a set of reasons offered as proof that your opinion is right
- 4 It is quite **certain** that the continued rise in the temperature of the oceans will lead to catastrophe sooner or later.
- a) confident that something is true
 - b) sure to happen
 - c) used to talk about a particular person or thing without naming them or describing them exactly
- 5 There are no simple **solutions** to the problem of global warming.
- a) a way of solving a problem
 - b) the correct answer to a problem in mathematics or a puzzle of some kind
 - c) a liquid in which a solid or gas has been dissolved

- 6 A large **number** of conditions can be treated with this drug.
- a) a word or sign that represents a quantity or an amount
 - b) a quantity of, e.g., things or people
 - c) a single item in a performance, e.g., a piece of music
- 7 The word “comedy” is used in its broadest **sense** here.
- a) one of the five natural abilities—sight, hearing, feeling, taste, and smell
 - b) a feeling based on instinct rather than fact
 - c) the meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence
- 8 The regulations were introduced in order to safeguard the **interests** of local people.
- a) activities or subjects you enjoy in your spare time
 - b) the things that bring benefits
 - c) amount, usually a percentage, paid for the use of someone’s money
- 9 There is a strong **case** for increasing tax on luxury items.
- a) an example of something happening
 - b) a set of reasons why something should happen or be done
 - c) a legal matter that will be dealt with in court
- 10 The patient was in a very bad **way** after the operation.
- a) a method of doing something
 - b) condition
 - c) a route you take to go somewhere

Task 2: Different word class, different meaning

Words can sometimes belong in different classes. For example, *mean* can be a noun, adjective, or verb. Some of these words can have a different meaning depending on the word class.

Example:

Word	Meaning
mean (noun)	● an average
mean (verb)	● to have a particular meaning
mean (adjective)	● unkind

Study tip

Use a dictionary to clarify the word class(es) that individual words belong to. With most words, you will also need to check the context in which they are used.

- 2.1** Choose the correct word class for the words in bold. Then check your answer by looking at the definitions.

Example:

The article **addresses** the issue of over-fishing in different parts of the world.

- a) noun: where someone lives
- b)** verb: to begin trying to solve a problem

- 1 Experts believe the current instability in world stock markets will not **last** long.
 - a) adjective: coming after all the others
 - b) verb: continue or endure for a particular length of time
- 2 The company director was a powerful leader and people would rarely **question** his decisions.
 - a) noun: a phrase you ask when you want information
 - b) verb: to express doubts about something
- 3 The **key** issue in the next election will almost certainly be the economy.
 - a) adjective: most important
 - b) noun: a metal instrument used for opening or locking a door
- 4 Many analysts believe the country is entering a period of **relative** economic instability.
 - a) noun: a family member
 - b) adjective: having a particular quality in comparison with something else
- 5 The company intends to **form** an alliance with a partner company in China.
 - a) verb: to bring into existence
 - b) noun: a particular type of something
- 6 The final decision on the merger will be made by the **board**.
 - a) verb: to get on a plane, train, ship, etc.
 - b) noun: a group of people who manage a company
- 7 Environmentalists **object** to the proposed new motorway.
 - a) verb: to express disapproval or opposition to something
 - b) noun: a physical thing that you can see, hold, or touch
- 8 It is a **matter** of some concern that security at some airports is not up to international standards.
 - a) noun: a topic that you discuss, think about, or deal with
 - b) verb: to be important
- 9 The company is well-known for its **sound** financial management.
 - a) noun: something that you hear
 - b) adjective: well-founded, sensible, trustworthy
- 10 As a result of the bad weather, many flights were **subject** to delay.
 - a) noun: an idea or topic of discussion
 - b) adjective: affected by or experiencing something



- 2.2** Use your dictionary to check the meanings of the words in bold in the text below. Write the appropriate definition for the words as they appear in the text.

Education is a pillar of modern **society** and the **subject** of endless, often passionate, arguments about how it can best be improved. In the US, there is **heated** debate following revelations that the country's secondary school students **perform** poorly relative to many Asian and European students. The news coincided with increasing **concern** over the nation's urban and lower-income suburban schools, too many of which are languishing at achievement levels **far** below those of middle-class and upper middle-class suburban schools.



Source: Slaght, J., Harben, P., & Pallant, A. (2006). The Influence of Class Size on Academic Achievement. *English for Academic Study: Reading and Writing Source Book*. Reading: Garnet Education.

Example: society

people in general living together in organized groups with rules and traditions _____

governing the way they behave towards one another _____

a) subject

b) heated

c) perform

d) concern

e) far

Study tip

Use a comprehensive dictionary whenever possible, as some smaller dictionaries do not provide example sentences.

Task 3: Review

3.1 Each of these words from Unit 1 can belong to more than one word class. Complete the table.

Example: key	<i>adjective</i>	<i>verb</i>	<i>noun</i>	
a) subject	_____	_____	_____	_____
b) relative	_____	_____	_____	_____
c) form	_____	_____	_____	_____
d) sound	_____	_____	_____	_____
e) order	_____	_____	_____	_____
f) object	_____	_____	_____	_____
g) matter	_____	_____	_____	_____
h) question	_____	_____	_____	_____

3.2 Choose four of the words in Ex 3.1 and write them in sentences to show their meaning.

Example: *object*

I object to the way many people treat their pets. _____

In the past, women were treated as objects. _____

- a) _____

- b) _____

- c) _____

- d) _____

Study tip

You may need to write and use a word several times before you remember it.

