LESSON 1
Using Context Clues

Building Vocabulary

Reading can be a complex process. Whenever you read, you apply decoding skills of various kinds to get meaning from the text. One of those skills—and a vital one—is recognizing and understanding vocabulary.

Vocabulary is the collection of words that you encounter throughout your reading life. In fact, the English language is so rich with words that your vocabulary will probably continue to grow for as long as you continue to read. Increasing your vocabulary will not only make you sound more articulate when you write and speak, it will also increase your understanding of anything else you read and hear.

No matter what you're reading—a textbook, a newspaper article, a popular magazine, a Web page, or the liner notes for some new music—you will understand and appreciate it more if you know what each word means. How can you make this happen?

Strategies to Use

Here are some of the most effective ways to build vocabulary as you read:

- Analyzing context clues
- Recognizing word parts like prefixes and suffixes
- Looking for words within words

Let's take a look at the first strategy listed above — analyzing context clues.

Analyzing Context Clues

What does the phrase *context clues* mean? Context clues are the parts of a reading that surround a word or phrase you don't know and that can shed some light on its meaning. Some examples of context clues might be

- a definition before or after the unfamiliar word or phrase
- a synonym or an antonym near the unfamiliar word
- examples in the text that illustrate the meaning of the unfamiliar word or phrase
- restatement of the basic meaning of the unfamiliar word or phrase