

# Cheat Sheet

Meaning

Information,  
and  
Inferences

## Definition:

An inference is a conclusion which is reached based on prior knowledge and factual information.

<sup>1</sup> Preszler, J., & Hartmann, J. (Eds.). (2006). Strategies to Help Readers Make Meaning through Inferences. Black Hills Special Service Cooperative (BHSSC).

### In our daily life

Inferential skills are essential in our daily life as they enable us to make meaning when it is not explicitly clear.

For example:

Inference from the expression

The boy is unhappy with something

## Why are inferential skills important?

### In the English language

In reading, one of the most basic and important skills to have is the skill of making inference. It allows readers to learn new vocabulary and gain a deeper understanding of a text.

For example:

The elderly lady was a picture of grace and kindness as she is constantly wearing a benign smile on her face.

Inference from the description

## Infering meaning of words from contextual clues

### Types of contextual clues

	How is the meaning of a new word inferred?	Example
<b>Definition</b>	Directly given in the text. Usually around the word in the text	He has had <u>coulrophobia</u> , or a fear of <u>clowns</u> , ever since he was frightened by a big, scary clown when he was five.
<b>Restatement</b>	By restating the meaning in a less direct manner	For years, scientists have been baffled by a <u>conundrum</u> - the <u>riddle</u> of what led to the extinction of dinosaurs.
<b>Similarities</b>	Via words / phrases with similar meanings	His <u>bellicose</u> personality mirrors his father's <u>hostile</u> nature.
<b>Differences</b>	Via words / phrases with opposite meanings	Michael tends to be <u>brusque</u> ; <u>on the other hand</u> , Linda is usually polite.
<b>Cause and effect</b>	Via stating the cause or effect of an action	The <u>acrimony</u> between Paul and Bill was a result of a <u>bitter falling-out</u> over a failed million-dollar investment.
<b>Example</b>	Via examples, which illustrate the word's meaning	Many types of <u>marsupials</u> , such as kangaroos and koalas, can be found in Australia.

# How to infer meaning of words from contextual clues

Aa Bb Cc

## Step 1

Determine which part of speech the word belongs to. From this, you can know what type of word it is, e.g. an object, an action etc.

## Step 2

Look at the grammar of the word, such as the prefix or suffix. This can give you a clue to the meaning of the word.

## Step 3

Look at the other words in the sentence. They often contain clues to the word's meaning.

## Step 5

Guess the meaning of the word. Check your answer by replacing the word with the meaning and see if the text is still correct and logical.

## Step 4

Look at the sentences around the sentence with the new word. They can give an idea of the context in which the word is used.

## Example: Inferring the meaning of the word "incarceration"

### Step 1

The word "incarceration" belongs to the part of speech of **NOUN**.

### Step 2

The word has a suffix of **-tion**. This indicates that it may be a **process**.

### Step 3

From this phrase, and our prior knowledge of law and crime, the meaning of "incarceration" can be implied as "**imprisonment**", which is a noun and a process.

### Step 4

The context of the sentences indicates that "incarceration" means "**imprisonment**".

### Step 5

The sentence remains correct even if "incarceration" is replaced with "imprisonment".

When the judge delivered the verdict of guilty and sentenced Johnny to ten years of **incarceration** for the crime of robbery, his wife broke down and sobbed. He was the sole breadwinner of the family. How would she support her two young children now?

# Interpreting text using inferential skill

Readers can use inferential skills to help them to interpret a text. This is especially useful when answering questions in a comprehension exercise.

## How to infer answers to comprehension questions

### Sample text:

Officer Tan proceeded cautiously into the alley. The coppery smell of blood and death hit him before he even saw the body. He walked gingerly towards it, careful not to step on the bloodstains on the ground. The victim lay on her back, her glorious mane matted with blood. Some blood flowed out of her snout. Her limbs were sprawled out around her body, and a leash, presumably hers, lay nearby. A chain around her neck held a pendant inscribed with the name 'Lily'. "This is the third case this month," thought Officer Tan grimly.

**Question:**  
What do you think Lily is?

**1)** Read the question. Highlight keywords which will help you to answer it.

**Keywords for the question are:**  
What, Lily and is.

**2)** Look for information in the text which can help you to answer the question.

**Some clues provided in the text include:**  
mane, snout, leash, and a chain with the name Lily.

**3)** Bring in prior knowledge of the topic and logical reasoning.

**The items- 'mane', 'snout', 'leash' and 'chain with name'- are usually associated with pet dogs, so Lily is likely a dog.**

**4)** Relate prior knowledge to the text to infer the answer.

**5)** Check your answer by checking if it fits with the overall context of the text.

**Is there any detail in the text which opposes your inference?**

### References

Preszler, J., & Hartmann, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Strategies to Help Readers Make Meaning through Inferences*. Black Hills Special Service Cooperative (BHSSC).

Walters, J. Methods of Teaching Inferring Meaning from Context. *RELC Journal*, 37(2), 176-190. Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/314358/Methods\\_of\\_Teaching\\_Inferring\\_Meaning\\_From\\_Context](http://www.academia.edu/314358/Methods_of_Teaching_Inferring_Meaning_From_Context)

Using Context Clues. (2010). Retrieved from The Longman Vocabulary Website, [http://wps.ablongman.com/long\\_licklider\\_vocabulary\\_2/6/1626/416421.cw/index.html](http://wps.ablongman.com/long_licklider_vocabulary_2/6/1626/416421.cw/index.html) parentloc

Rhalmi, M. (2013). *Guessing meaning from context*. Retrieved from <http://www.myenglishpages.com/blog/guessing-meaning-from-context/>

fb.com/sensure

www.nlb.gov.sg/sure

**S**ource  
Look at its origins.  
Is it trustworthy?

**U**nderstand  
Know what you're reading.  
Search for clarity.

**R**esearch  
Dig deeper. Go beyond  
the initial source.

**E**valuate  
Find the balance. Exercise  
fair judgement.

