CRAFT AND STRUCTURE / 01 UNDERSTAND

Words in context

An illustrated lesson ▪ Theory, reasoning and worked examples

Context selects a meaning

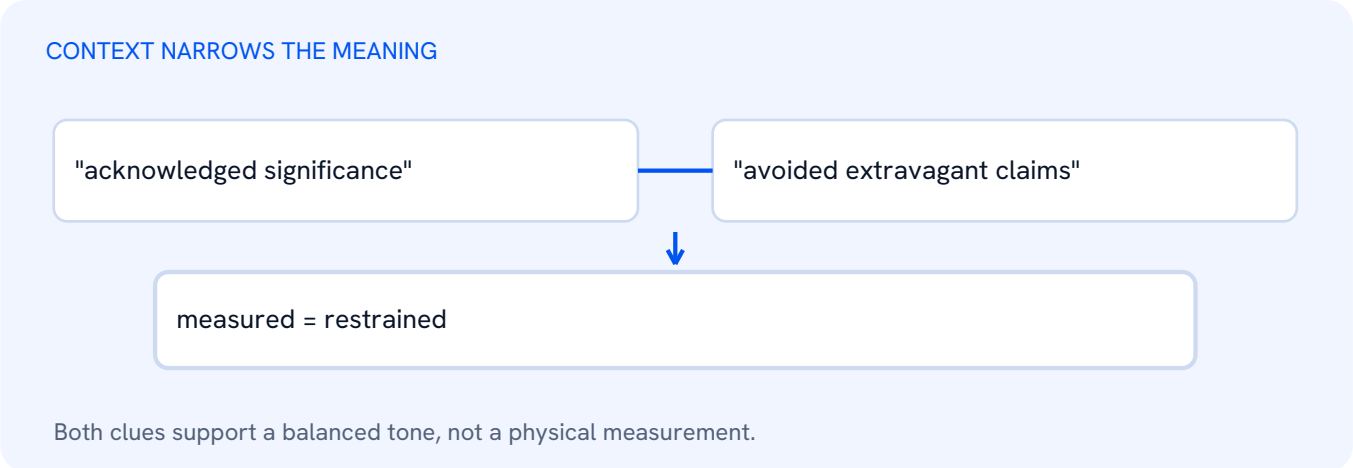
A familiar word may have several legitimate meanings, but only one fits a particular passage. A words-in-context task asks which meaning or completion preserves the writer's claim. The task is not to choose the most advanced vocabulary or a word that can be a synonym somewhere else. Local evidence controls the answer.

Read beyond the target word

The clause containing a word may not provide enough evidence on its own. A nearby contrast, explanation, example or result often narrows the meaning. Words such as although, because and instead tell you how ideas relate. Read the full sentence and its neighbours before deciding what the writer intends.

Predict before comparing options

Replace the target with a plain phrase of your own. A prediction such as difficult to detect or strongly supported is often more useful than another sophisticated word. It creates a meaning to test against the choices and reduces the temptation to choose a familiar distractor without evidence.



Illustrative teaching diagram. Values and examples are explained in the lesson.

THE ESSENTIAL IDEA

Choose the meaning supported by the sentence rather than a familiar dictionary meaning.

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE / 02 BUILD THE METHOD

From idea to method

Use logic as a constraint

In Although the signal was faint, the instrument detected it, faint describes something weak rather than something impossible to detect. The contrast tells us that detection was still achieved. An answer meaning absent would contradict the sentence, even if absent and faint both suggest a small amount.

Check connotation and intensity

Words can share a broad meaning but differ in tone or strength. Cautious is not the same as terrified; supported is not the same as proved beyond doubt. Select a word with the degree of certainty and emotional tone justified by the passage, avoiding stronger claims than the text makes.

Substitute and reread

After selecting a candidate, put it into the complete sentence and check grammar, meaning and the relationship between clauses. A dictionary definition may fit the isolated word but make the sentence illogical. If two choices seem plausible, identify the exact evidence that distinguishes them rather than choosing by sound.

WORKED EXAMPLE / A FAMILIAR WORD WITH A DIFFERENT SENSE

The historian’s account was measured: she acknowledged the discovery’s significance but avoided extravagant claims. What does measured mean here?

01 Set up the reasoning

The explanation after the colon supplies the evidence: significance is recognized, but claims remain restrained.

02 Apply the relationship

A plain prediction is balanced or restrained. Measured does not refer to recording a physical length.

03 Interpret and check

A choice such as restrained fits both the explanation and the sentence’s tone. A choice meaning indifferent would ignore the acknowledged significance.

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE / 03 CONNECT & REMEMBER

See the deeper pattern

Separate vocabulary from outside knowledge

You do not need to know the historical discovery to interpret measured in this sentence. The evidence is supplied by the writer's description. When a passage uses a technical subject, focus first on ordinary logical relationships; do not replace the text's meaning with a fact you happen to know about that subject.

ONE MORE WORKED APPLICATION

Mira called the evidence "compelling" because several independent trials supported the same conclusion. As used here, compelling most nearly means what?

1. The evidence persuades the researcher because separate trials agree.

2. Convincing preserves that meaning; compulsory would not.

Answer: convincing

Mistakes to recognize

- A possible dictionary meaning is not necessarily the contextual meaning.
- A word with the right topic can still have the wrong tone.
- Use the full contrast or explanation, not just the nearest noun.

A quick understanding check

Why make your own prediction first?

Explanation: It anchors your decision to the passage instead of to the wording of the answer choices.

MORE PRACTICE IN YOUR DASHBOARD

Open prepvora.com/app/ and use the SAT question bank. Work on Craft and Structure, then look for words in context questions. Solve independently before reviewing the explanation. Use this guide for the theory; use the dashboard for a longer practice session.

Open your dashboard → | Explore the resource library →

Original Prepvora explanations and examples. Scope: this topic, not the entire SAT syllabus. 2026-10-01 ▪ theory-v2