

Strategies to Analyze Words: Context and Word Structure Clues

It is impossible to know the meaning of every word in a language. Good readers develop strategies to determine the meanings of unknown words as they read without having to look them up in the dictionary. Good readers also know that their guesses may be wrong. They then use more traditional methods of finding the word's meaning: looking it up in the dictionary or asking for assistance.

Both Spanish and English inherited many words from Latin. If you have knowledge of Latin root words, prefixes, and suffixes, you can often make educated guesses about the meaning of words that contain them. Let's take a look at the Latin root words *manus* and *ped* and how they still have meaning for speakers of English and Spanish.

Latin root	English meaning	Spanish meaning	Related words in English and Spanish
<i>manus</i>	hand	<i>mano</i>	manual labor/ <i>trabajo manual</i> = work done by hand
<i>ped</i>	foot	<i>pie</i>	pedestrian/ <i>peatón</i> = someone who travels on foot

Words such as “manual” that look alike and have similar meanings are called cognates.

Tip

Just because a word in Spanish looks like a word in English, the two words are not always cognates. One famous mistake for beginning Spanish students is to try to communicate “I am embarrassed” by saying, “*Yo estoy embarazada*,” which means, “I am pregnant” in Spanish! Similarly, an English speaker who assumes that every word in English that contains *ped* relates in some way to feet would be mistaken. A pediatrician is not a foot doctor, but a doctor for children.

When making an educated guess about an unusual word, good readers will always test their guess in context. In other words, you will insert your guessed meaning into the actual sentence where you found the unusual word.

- On page 41 of your textbook, re-read the note written by Pablo. He says, “*No me gusta ni jugar videojuegos ni ver la tele.*” If you know that the word *ver* means “to see” or “to watch” in English, what is the most likely meaning of “*la tele*”?
 - the telephone
 - the telegraph
 - the television
 - the teller

Sample question:

- The Latin prefix *bi-* relates to the number “two” in English. In which of the following sentences does the word containing the letters *b-i-* actually have a meaning relating to the number “two”? (Remember to use context clues.)
 - I was tired of living in a small apartment so I decided to move into something bigger.
 - The bison was one of the largest mammals to live on the North American continent.
 - Now that I can speak Spanish and English, I am bilingual.
 - Biology was my favorite subject in school.