

# Developing Skills for Defining Key Words and Phrases

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## How can you develop strong skills for defining key words and phrases?

To understand what you are reading, you define key words and phrases in a text. To strengthen your skills for defining key words and phrases, use the steps demonstrated on the following screens.

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### Step 1: Identify key words and phrases as you read.

The passage below is from “Putting the Second Amendment Second” (pages 75–79). Note the underlined words and phrases.

And when it came to guns, a companion statute to the 14th Amendment, enacted by Congress in 1866, declared that “laws . . . concerning personal liberty [and] personal security . . . including the constitutional right to bear arms, shall be secured to and enjoyed by all the citizens.”

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**Step 2: Access background knowledge by asking the question, “What do I already know about this word/phrase?”**

Key Words / Phrases	What I Already Know
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	What do you already know?
Personal security	
Right to bear arms	

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Key Words / Phrases	What I Already Know
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	The 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment relates to the Bill of Rights. A companion is something that goes with something else. A statue is a law.
Personal security	
Right to bear arms	

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Personal security	What do you already know?
Right to bear arms	

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Key Words / Phrases	What I Already Know
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	The 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment relates to the Bill of Rights. A companion is something that goes with something else. A statue is a law.
Personal security	Security has to do with feeling safe and protected from harm.
Right to bear arms	

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A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	The 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment relates to the Bill of Rights. A companion is something that goes with something else. A statue is a law.
Personal security	Security has to do with feeling safe and protected from harm.
Right to bear arms	What do you already know?

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**Step 2: Access background knowledge by asking the question, “What do I already know about this word/phrase?”**

Key Words / Phrases	What I Already Know
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	The 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment relates to the Bill of Rights. A companion is something that goes with something else. A statue is a law.
Personal security	Security has to do with feeling safe and protected from harm.
Right to bear arms	The term <i>arms</i> refers to weapons.



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**Step 3: Use the context to understand how the writer is using the term. A word used in the context of a government or science book may have a different meaning from its everyday meaning.**

**Types of context clues include**

- definitions (explain meaning)
- examples (illustrate)
- restatements (give different words)
- contrasts (show an opposite)

On the next screens, context clues are highlighted.

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**Context for Key Phrase:** a companion statute to the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment

And when it came to guns, a companion statute to the 14th Amendment, enacted by Congress in 1866, declared that “laws . . . concerning personal liberty [and] personal security . . . including the constitutional right to bear arms, shall be secured to and enjoyed by all the citizens.”

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**Context for Key Phrase:** personal security

. . . a companion statute . . . declared that “laws . . . concerning personal liberty [and] personal security . . . shall be secured to and enjoyed by all the citizens.” . . . Here . . . the “bear arms” phrase was decisively severed from the military context. Women as well as men could claim a “personal” right to protect their “personal liberty” and “**personal security**” **in their homes**. . . .Congress clearly understood that Southern blacks might need guns **in their homes to protect themselves from private violence** . . . .

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**Context for Key Phrase:** right to bear arms

Here, in sharp contrast to founding-era legal texts, the “bear arms” phrase was decisively **severed from the military context**. Women as well as men could claim a “personal” **right to protect their “personal liberty” and “personal security” in their homes**. The Reconstruction-era Congress clearly understood that Southern blacks might **need guns in their homes** to protect themselves from private violence in places where they could not rely on local constables to keep their neighborhoods safe.

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**Step 4: Formulate a “working” definition of the words and phrases as you continue to read the selection.**

Key Words / Phrases	Working Definition
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	A law created after the Civil War to give Southern blacks the right to have guns to protect themselves
Personal security	
Right to bear arms	

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**Step 4: Formulate a “working” definition of the words and phrases as you continue to read the selection.**

Key Words / Phrases	Working Definition
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	A law created after the Civil War to give Southern blacks the right to have guns to protect themselves
Personal security	Individual safety
Right to bear arms	

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**Step 4: Formulate a “working” definition of the words and phrases as you continue to read the selection.**

Key Words / Phrases	Working Definition
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	A law created after the Civil War to give Southern blacks the right to have guns to protect themselves
Personal security	Individual safety
Right to bear arms	Right to have a gun to protect your person and property

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## Hints

- As you continue to read, reformulate your definition as you gain more information.
- Watch for examples or illustrations of the term to help you flesh out your understanding.



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**Step 5: Use available tools (glossaries, footnotes, dictionaries) to confirm your working definition.**

Key Words / Phrases	What I Learned From Available Tools
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Research revealed that this was the Civil Rights Act of 1866 that was passed before the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment.
Personal security	
Right to bear arms	

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**Step 5: Use available tools (glossaries, footnotes, dictionaries) to confirm your working definition.**

Key Words / Phrases	What I Learned From Available Tools
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Research revealed that this was the Civil Rights Act of 1866 that was passed before the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment.
Personal security	Definition from a law dictionary: The legal and uninterrupted enjoyment of one's life, health, and reputation.
Right to bear arms	

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Key Words / Phrases	What I Learned From Available Tools
A companion statue to the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment	Research revealed that this was the Civil Rights Act of 1866 that was passed before the 14 <sup>th</sup> Amendment.
Personal security	Definition from a law dictionary: The legal and uninterrupted enjoyment of one's life, health, and reputation.
Right to bear arms	A glossary of terms explained this as a person's right to own and use firearms for personal use.