

Defining Key Words and Phrases

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 on the following screens. You will see these steps demonstrated in this lesson.

Defining Key Words and Phrases

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

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

Step 3: Use the context to understand how the writer is using the term in the specific text you are reading.

Step 4: Refine your definition of the words and phrases as you continue to read the selection.

Defining Key Words and Phrases

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

The passage below is from “The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb” (pages 24–39). Note the three words in italics and think about their meaning in the passage.

Lady Willard was a tall, thin woman, dressed in deep *mourning*. Her *haggard* face bore *eloquent* testimony to her recent grief.

Defining Key Words and Phrases

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
mourning	
haggard	
eloquent	

Defining Key Words and Phrases

Your responses may look like this.

Key Words/Phrases	What I Already Know
mourning	I know that people “go into mourning” after someone dies, which I think means they are in a time of sorrow.
haggard	I am not familiar with this word.
eloquent	I have heard <i>eloquent</i> used to describe a serious speech by a president. It sounds a little like “loquacious,” which is how my mom describes my uncle who talks a lot.

Defining Key Words and Phrases

Step 3: Use the context to understand how the writer is using the term in the specific text you are reading.

A word may have a specialized meaning in a text. For example, *supplementary* commonly means “additional.” In math, it describes two angles with measures that add up to 180 degrees. You can use context clues to help you understand a word’s 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.

Defining Key Words and Phrases

It was then that Poirot received a brief note from Lady Willard, **widow of the dead archaeologist**, asking him to go and see her at her house in Kensington Square. I accompanied him.

Lady Willard was a tall, thin woman, dressed in deep *mourning*. Her *haggard* face bore *eloquent* testimony to her recent **grief**.

Defining Key Words and Phrases

Step 4: Refine your definition of the words and phrases as you continue to read the selection.

Key Words/Phrases	Working Definition
mourning	
haggard	
eloquent	

Defining Key Words and Phrases

Your responses may look like this.

Key Words/Phrases	Working Definition
mourning	feeling bad because someone has recently died
haggard	showing grief
eloquent	express with seriousness

Defining Key Words and Phrases

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 of the terms.

Defining Key Words and Phrases

To confirm your definition, check it against a dictionary, glossary, footnotes, or other tools.

Key Words/Phrases	What I Learned From Available Tools
mourning	
haggard	
eloquent	

Defining Key Words and Phrases

Your responses may look like this.

Key Words/Phrases	What I Learned From Available Tools
mourning	Dictionary—clothes or other signs of grief resulting from a person's death
haggard	Dictionary—having a sad or tired appearance
eloquent	Dictionary—demonstrating a clear expression of feeling

Defining Key Words and Phrases

Using the context of the story and information from dictionaries, glossaries, and footnotes, your final definitions may look like this.

Key Words/Phrases	Definitions
mourning	clothes or other signs that a person is sad because of someone's death
haggard	having a sad or tired appearance because of a sad event
eloquent	demonstrating a clear expression of feeling, particularly seriousness