Developing Skills for 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 screen. You will see these steps demonstrated in this lesson.

Developing Skills for 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.

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

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

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

The passage below is from "Your Body is Your ID" (pages 28–30). Note the underlined words and phrases.

The most familiar <u>biometric technique is fingerprinting</u>, but whipping out a magnifying glass and <u>then checking a print against a database of potential matches</u> can lead to long lines at security checkpoints.

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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
biometric	
technique	
database	

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Your responses may look like this.

Key Words/Phrases	What I Already Know
biometric	*bio-* means "life" *metric* has to do with measuring
technique	I think this has to do with special skills or abilities. My basketball coach talks about improving our shooting technique.
database	I've heard this word used in reference to computers.

Step 3: Use the context to understand how the writer is using the term in the specific text you are reading.
Be aware that a word used in the context of a government or science book may have a different meaning than when it is used in everyday conversation.

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 Phrases: biometric technique

The most familiar biometric technique is fingerprinting, but whipping out a magnifying glass and then checking a print against a database of potential matches can lead to long lines at security checkpoints. Now, computers can make matches in seconds, sparking new varieties of biometric identification with their ever-increasing processing power. Identification databases can be searched to match facial features, the geometry of your hand, your voice, and even your iris.

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Context for Key Phrases: databases

The most familiar biometric technique is fingerprinting, but whipping out a magnifying glass and then checking a print against a database of potential matches can lead to long lines at security checkpoints. Now, computers can make matches in seconds, sparking new varieties of biometric identification with their ever-increasing processing power. Identification databases can be searched to match facial features, the geometry of your hand, your voice, and even your iris.

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

As you read, you may gain more information that will help you flesh out your working definition. Be aware of examples or illustrations that add to your understanding of unfamiliar terms.

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Directions: Develop a working definition of the following key words and phrases. Be sure to use your own words.

Key Words/Phrases	Working Definition
biometric	
technique	
database	

Developing Skills for Defining Key Words and Phrases

Your responses may look like this.

Key Words/Phrases	Working Definition
biometric	having to do with measuring or identifying life
technique	a special skill or way of doing something
database	a storehouse or collection of information

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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
biometric	
technique	
database	

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Your responses may look like this.

Key Words/Phrases	What I Learned From Available Tools
biometric	Dictionary—the measurement and analysis of unique physical or behavioral characteristics especially as a means of verifying personal identity
technique	Dictionary—body of technical methods
database	Dictionary—a collection of data organized for easy search and retrieval

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Your final definitions may look like this.

Key Words/Phrases	Definitions
biometric	having to do with measuring a person's identity based upon unique characteristics such as fingerprints
technique	technical methods
database	collection of data, usually housed in a computer