1. **Choosing Words to Learn**

**Exercise: Read** the excerpt from a textbook and complete the tasks that follow.

**Symbols**

Reality for human beings is not action or feeling but meaning. Humans are symbolic creatures; a symbol is anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by the people who share culture. We see the human capacity to create and manipulate symbols in the various ways a simple wink of the eye can convey interest, understanding, or insult. We are so dependent on our culture's symbols that we take them for granted. Often, however, we gain a heightened sense of the importance of a symbol when someone uses it in an unconventional way. Entering an unfamiliar culture also reminds us of the power of symbols; culture shock is nothing more than the inability to "read" meaning in one's surroundings. We feel lost, unsure of how to act, and sometimes frightened—a consequence of slipping outside the symbolic web of culture. Culture shock is both what travelers experience and what they inflict on others by acting in ways that may offend them. For example, because North Americans consider dogs to be beloved household pets, travelers to the People's Republic of China might well be appalled to discover people roasting dogs as a wintertime meal. On the other hand, a North American who orders a hamburger in India causes offense to Hindus, who hold cows to be sacred and thus unfit for human consumption.

(Source: John J. Macionis, Society: The Basics, 4th Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998)

**A.** Mark each statement T (true) or F (false).

1. A symbol is usually written.

2. We always notice the symbols of our own culture.

3. In an unfamiliar culture, we feel confused by the symbols.

4. Culture shock is mostly about food.

**B.** Read the passage again and underline the words that are new to you.

**C.** Look at for the words you underlined. Choose two of your underlined words and write them below. Then write the part of speech and the dictionary definition that best fits each word as it is used in the passage.

**D.** Write a new sentence for each word above. The sentences should show that you understand the meaning of each word as it is used in the passage.

**E.** Ask another student to read your sentences. Then discuss these questions.

1. Do the sentences make sense? 2. Do the sentences show the meaning of the words?

1. **Inferring Meaning from Context**

**Exercise 1:** Follow the guidelines above to infer the general meaning of the underlined word in each of the three sentences below. Then write the inferred meaning (in English or another language). Do not use a dictionary.

The president's spokesman said that it was too early to comment on the outcome of the meeting.

One unfortunate outcome of the elections was that both parties were weaker than before.

The outcome of hospital-based treatment was clearly better than home-based treatment.

*Inferred meaning: …………………………………….*

**Exercise 2:**

**A.** Follow the guidelines to infer the general meaning of the underlined word in each set of two sentences below. Then write the inferred meaning (in English or another language). Do not use a dictionary.

Dark clouds appeared and ten minutes later everyone at the football match was completely drenched.

When Seymour screamed and sat up suddenly in bed, drenched in a cold sweat.

*Inferred meaning: ……………………………………*

It is illegal to add, take away, or otherwise tamper with the content of these videos.

Several research assistants were accused of tampering with the results of the experiments.

*Inferred meaning:……………………………………*

**B.** Compare your answers with those of another student. Then look up drenched and tamper in the dictionary. Compare the dictionary definitions with your inferred meanings and write the dictionary definitions below:

drenched:……………………………………………………………………………..

tamper: ………………………………………………………………………………..

**3. Using Context to Choose a Dictionary Definition**

**Exercise:** **A.** Read each sentence and choose the most appropriate definition of the underlined word.

a. It was an obvious attempt to shift the blame for the accident onto the other driver.

b. Working the night shift can create family problems for both men and women.

c. Politicians argued that there was a strong need to shift more resources into education and research.

d. The lawyer's sharp questions made the witness shift uncomfortably in his seat.

**Definitions:**

1. v. to move from one place or position to another, or make something do this

2. v. to change the way money is paid or spent

3. v. to make someone else responsible for something, especially for something bad that has happened

4. n. a change in the way people think about something or the way something is done

5. n. one of the periods during each day and night when a particular group of workers in a factory, hospital, etc., are at work

6. n. the key on a computer keyboard that you press to print a capital letter

**B.** Compare your answers with those of another student. Then discuss the definitions of shift. What basic meaning do they have in common?

1. **Inferring the Meaning of a Word in a Paragraph**

Beyond the immediate context of the sentence, you can also find clues to the meaning of an unknown word in the larger context of a whole paragraph.

In the following exercise you will practice inferring meaning from a whole paragraph, with a nonsense word in the place of a real word.

**Exercise:** Read the following paragraph and answer the questions about the underlined nonsense word.

As the harmful effects of mropping on health have become widely known, many cities and some countries have passed laws that limit where it is allowed. In many places, mropping is no longer permitted in restaurants and coffee shops. Owners of restaurants were against the laws because they believed that their businesses would suffer, but that happened only in the first few months. After that, business returned to normal. The laws have also had another positive effect, apart from making the air cleaner for everyone: More people have given up mropping altogether.

a. What part of speech is it?

b. What words are found around it?

c. What word or phrase could replace it?