

Module 1: Context Matters

Context is critical in college-level learning.

Words matter, of course. But they only tell part of the story. In fact, the same words in different CONTEXTS (settings or situations) can mean very different things. Words, by themselves, can easily be misunderstood. Think about texting and emailing. Have you ever misunderstood what someone was saying because you did not understand the context? For instance, you may have been asked to do something later. But what does later actually mean? For some, it means much later- like a day or week. For others, it could mean in a few minutes. And for some other people, saying later actually means never. How do you know? CONTEXT!

Contextual details tell the audience

- what is important
- where and what assumptions they should draw about the idea
- the meaning to what is being communicated

You add context to your communication by determining what the audience (the people who will read or hear your idea) already know about the topic, by determining what the audience could infer (conclude) from your idea, what they might not understand, and what could happen if they misunderstand, and if you have all the necessary information included. To add context, review your idea and make sure you view the idea or topic with empathy- meaning that you place yourself in your audience's shoes.

You'll use contextual details when learning and working with topics in college. Contextual details may be included in the writings you read. In college-level learning, you may need to seek out the detail you need (for example, you may have a dataset but need to look at other records to understand the time period and world events at the time the data was collected in order to understand the data more completely). In textbooks, the context will be clear; it is part of the writing. In authentic writings (those written for use by scholars and experts), you will need to work to add context, especially in unfamiliar areas of study.

Beyond the classroom, context shapes every interaction you have and your understanding of others and your environment.

Without realizing it, you are paying attention to your environment (the setting), and your situation (what is happening around you). This constant analysis of context is important- it keeps you safe, and it allows you to understand what is happening. Context, in the physical world, relies on what you see, hear, and feel and what you have experienced in the past. It affects how you see objects, expressions, and emotions.

Paying attention to context is important- it matters for your personal life and relationships, your safety, and your studies. Using contextual information will help you understand the material in your classes and help you communicate your ideas in ways that will ensure your audience receives your message clearly.

From the book *Joys & Challenges: 10 things you need to know to survive, thrive, and dive into college learning* (anticipated 2023) Bridget Lepore & Elin Waring, Lehman College

By the end of this module, you will:

- Know the history of Lehman College
- Understand what a liberal arts education is
- Identify potential degrees you could earn here at Lehman College
- Consider your new identity and role as a student and how you will adapt to this