

INFERENCE

An **inference** is a conclusion reached by using evidence and reasoning. Making inferences is a way of using information available in a text to make informed guesses about what is not yet known (i.e., “reading between the lines”).

We make inferences every day. For example, if you lost your cell phone and remember that the last time you saw it was in your bedroom, you might infer that it is in your bedroom. It may not be there, but the available evidence leads you to this feasible conclusion. It may be an incorrect conclusion, simply because inferences are rarely certain.

There are two main uses of inference when reading a text: making predictions and guessing word meanings.

Making Predictions

EXAMPLE: John said, “Whatever you do, don’t go into the basement.”

A few conclusions can be inferred from this:

- 1) It foreshadows a trip to the basement later in the text. One can guess that since John said this, characters are probably going to go into the basement.
- 2) There is likely something bad or forbidden in the basement.

NOTE:

Is John a trustworthy character or a suspicious one? Inferences about what is in the basement might differ depending on the answer.

Guessing Word Meanings

EXAMPLE: She was gregarious, found always at one event or another around town and surrounded by laughing people. Her door was always open.

NOTE:

Be careful to not confuse inference with observation. An observation is something you notice or see, while an inference is something you conclude based on these observations.

The word *gregarious* may be unfamiliar, but one can infer from the content of the sentence what the definition of the unknown word is:

gre·gar·i·ous | /grə'gerēəs/
(adjective)

• fond of the company of others; sociable.

