



MODULE INTENSIVE READING
(PBI 221)

MODULE SESION 9

MAIN IDEA AND SUPPORTING SENTENCES

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Main Idea and Supporting Sentences

What is Main Idea?

The main idea of a paragraph is the author's message about the topic. It is often expressed directly or it can be implied.

Where are the main ideas found?

It is easy to identify a main idea that is directly expressed in the text.

- Main ideas are often found at the beginning of paragraphs. The first sentence often explains the subject being discussed in the passage.
- Main ideas are also found in the concluding sentences of a paragraph. The main idea can be expressed as a summation of the information in the paragraph as well as a link to the information in the next paragraph.

For example, the main topic might be Cheetahs. The main point could be they are fast. So the main idea is Cheetahs are fast.

Knowing the main idea will help you:

- Understand the paragraph
- Choose the best paragraph heading with more accuracy
- Know the meaning of specific pronouns.
- Improve your general reading and comprehension skill

If you understand all the paragraphs you will understand the passage.

Understanding the passage means you can identify the main theme running through all the paragraphs and the biggest point the writer is trying to make, in the passage.

Source:

<https://www.ccis.edu/offices/academicresources/writingcenter/studyskills/textbookreadingstrategies/findingthemainidea.aspx>

By Kelly Roell

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Questions about the "main idea" of a passage are popular on reading comprehension tests, but sometimes, those questions are pretty difficult to answer, especially for students who are not completely sure they understand what the main idea really is. Finding the main idea of a paragraph or longer passage of text is one of the most important reading skills to master, along with concepts like making an inference, finding the author's purpose, or understanding vocabulary words in context. Here are a few techniques to help understand what, exactly, is a "main idea" and how to identify it accurately in a passage.

How to Define the Main Idea

The main idea of a paragraph is the primary point or concept that the author wants to communicate to the readers about the topic. Hence, in a paragraph, when the main idea is stated directly, it is expressed in what is called the topic sentence. It gives the overarching idea of what the paragraph is about and is supported by the details in subsequent sentences in the paragraph. In a multi-paragraph article, the main idea is expressed in the thesis statement, which is then supported by individual smaller points.

Think of the main idea as a brief but all-encompassing summary. It covers everything the paragraph talks about in a general way, but does not include the specifics. Those details will come in later sentences or paragraphs and add nuance and context; the main idea will need those details to support its argument.

For example, imagine a paper discussing the causes of World War I. One paragraph might be dedicated to the role that imperialism played in the conflict. The main idea

of this paragraph might be something like: "Constant competition for massive empires led to increasing tensions in Europe that eventually erupted into World War I." The rest of the paragraph might explore what those specific tensions were, who was involved, and why the countries were seeking empires, but the main idea just introduces the overarching argument of the section.

When an author does not state the main idea directly, it should still be implied, and is called an implied main idea. This requires that the reader look closely at the content—at specific words, sentences, images that are used and repeated—to deduce what the author is communicating.

How to Find the Main Idea

Finding the main idea is critical to understanding what you are reading. It helps the details make sense and have relevance, and provides a framework for remembering the content. Try these specific tips to pinpoint the main idea of a passage.

1) Identify the Topic

Read the passage through completely, then try to identify the topic. Who or what is the paragraph about? This part is just figuring out a topic like "cause of World War I" or "new hearing devices;" don't worry yet about deciding what argument the passage is making about this topic.

2) Summarize the Passage

After reading the passage thoroughly, summarize it in your own words in one sentence. Pretend you have just ten to twelve words to tell someone what the passage is about—what would you say?

3) Look at the First and Last Sentences of the Passage

Authors often put the main idea in or near either the first or last sentence of the paragraph or article, so isolate those sentences to see if they make sense as the overarching theme of the passage. Be careful: sometimes the author will use words like but, however, in contrast, nevertheless, etc. that indicate that the second sentence is actually the main idea. If you see one of these words that negate or qualify the first sentence, that is a clue that the second sentence is the main idea.

4) Look for Repetition of Ideas

If you read through a paragraph and you have no idea how to summarize it because there is so much information, start looking for repeated words, phrases, or related ideas. Read this example paragraph:

A new hearing device uses a magnet to hold the detachable sound-processing portion in place. Like other aids, it converts sound into vibrations, but it is unique in that it can transmit the vibrations directly to the magnet and then to the inner ear. This produces a clearer sound. The new device will not help all hearing-impaired people—only those with a hearing loss caused by infection or some other problem in the middle ear. It will probably help no more than 20 percent of all people with hearing problems. Those people who have persistent ear infections, however, should find relief and restored hearing with the new device.

What does this paragraph consistently talk about? A new hearing device. What is it trying to convey? A new hearing device is now available for some, but not all, hearing-impaired people. That's the main idea!

Source: <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-find-the-main-idea-3212047>

Identifying Topics, Main Ideas, and Supporting Details

Understanding the topic, the gist, or the larger conceptual framework of a textbook chapter, an article, a paragraph, a sentence or a passage is a sophisticated reading task. Being able to draw conclusions, evaluate, and critically interpret articles or chapters is important for overall comprehension in college reading. Textbook chapters, articles, paragraphs, sentences, or passages all have topics and main ideas. Before you can find the main idea you need to recognize the main topic. The main topic tells what the writing will be about. The main topic is not necessarily a complete sentence; it can be any thought ranging from a sentence or more to a single word.

What is the main topic, the main idea, and supporting details?

The **topic** is the broad, general theme or message. It is what some call the subject

How can I find the main topic?

KEY-Finding the main topic:

1. Look for repeated words or phrases
2. What is the author talking about all through the text?
3. Look for a topic sentence

Examples of topic sentences (a sentence that contains the main topic). The main topic is shown in bold.

Technology, such as a smart board is an essential part of the modern classroom. **Technology** can help a student learn.

London is the capital of England. It is a great city.

Riyadh's transport system needs updating. **The city** will soon have a world-class public **transport system**.

What is a main idea?

The main idea is the "key concept" being expressed. It's the central thought within the paragraph. It is the main point that the author is trying to say about the main topic.

"Once you can find the topic, you are ready to find the main idea. The main idea is the point of the paragraph. It is the most important thought about the topic.

To figure out the main idea, ask yourself this question: What is being said about the person, thing, or idea (the topic)?

The author can locate the main idea in different places within a paragraph. The main idea is usually a sentence, and it is usually the first sentence. The writer then uses the rest of the paragraph to support the main idea."

The key steps to finding the main idea

1. Read the whole paragraph
2. Identify the different types of sentences present within the paragraph, such as topic sentence, example, explanation or statistic.
3. Identify the main topic and what the writer is saying about the topic. This will be the main idea.
4. Ask yourself what central point is the writer trying to make? Construct in your mind what you think the main idea is. What is the biggest point(s) you have taken away from the paragraph? Use your own words.
5. Check if the examples and details support this main idea.
6. What point(s) has the most supporting details?

What are supporting details?

A paragraph contains details that support the main idea. Examples of details are: facts, statements, examples. They are specifics which guide us to a full understanding of the main idea. They clarify, illuminate, explain, describe, expand and illustrate the main idea and are supporting details.

Details, major and minor, support the main idea by telling how, what, when, where, why, how much, or how many. Locating the topic, main idea, and supporting details helps you understand the point(s) the writer is attempting to express. Identifying the relationship between these will increase your comprehension. The successful communication of any author's topic is only as good as the organization the author uses to build and define his/her subject matter.

Identifying supporting detail

If you can identify supporting detail, it will help you find the topic sentence and main idea and help you understand them. Supporting details can be definitions or examples or explanations.

Key- finding supporting details

- They are details. They are specific, not general. They answer questions raised by the main idea (who, what when, why or how).
- They are usually definitions, examples or explanations.
- They have various forms: definitions, descriptions, reason, comparisons, contrasts, statistics (numbers) quotations

Examples: supporting details are shown in **bold**

Example 1 Main idea: banks are used to save money in, and pay money from accounts

- Banks are places where people can keep their money. **Most people use banks to save money in their savings accounts and to pay money from their checking accounts.** Today, when a person earns money from their job, **their paycheck is often electronically deposited (put) into their savings or checking account.** Then, he or she can **pay their bills by writing checks from their checking accounts or pay online where their bills are electronically connected to their bank accounts.**

Grasping the Main Idea:

A paragraph is a group of sentences related to a particular topic, or central theme. Every paragraph has a key concept or main idea. The main idea is the most important piece of information the author wants you to know about the concept of that paragraph.

When authors write they have an idea in mind that they are trying to get across. This is especially true as authors compose paragraphs. An author organizes each paragraph's main idea and supporting details in support of the topic or central theme, and each paragraph supports the paragraph preceding it.

A writer will state his/her main idea explicitly somewhere in the paragraph. That main idea may be stated at the beginning of the paragraph, in the middle, or at the end. The sentence in which the main idea is stated is the **topic sentence** of that paragraph.

The topic sentence announces the general theme (or portion of the theme) to be dealt with in the paragraph. Although the topic sentence may appear anywhere in

the paragraph, it is usually first – and for a very good reason. This sentence provides the focus for the writer while writing and for the reader while reading. When you find the topic sentence, be sure to underline it so that it will stand out not only now, but also later when you review.

Key: How to find the topic sentence

- It is usually (but not always) the first sentence of a paragraph or near the end of the paragraph
- It is the most general sentence or statement
- It contains the main topic
- It sums up what the author is trying to say
- There are details supporting the topic sentence

Identifying the Topic:

The first thing you must be able to do to get at the main idea of a paragraph is to identify the topic – the subject of the paragraph. Think of the paragraph as a wheel with the topic being the hub – the central core around which the whole wheel (or paragraph) spins. Your strategy for topic identification is simply to ask yourself the question, "What is this about?" Keep asking yourself that question as you read a paragraph, until the answer to your question becomes clear. Sometimes you can spot the topic by looking for a word or two that repeat. Usually you can state the topic in a few words.

Let us try this topic-finding strategy. Reread the first paragraph under the heading Grasping the Main Idea. Ask yourself the question, "What is this paragraph about?" To answer, say to yourself in your mind, "The author keeps talking about paragraphs and the way they are designed. This must be the topic – paragraph organization." Reread the second paragraph of the same section. Ask yourself,

"What is this paragraph about?" Did you say to yourself, "This paragraph is about different ways to organize a paragraph"? That is the topic. Next, reread the third paragraph and see if you can find the topic of the paragraph. How? Write the topic in the margin next to this paragraph. Remember, getting the main idea of a paragraph is crucial to reading.

The bulk of an expository paragraph is made up of supporting sentences (major and minor details), which help to explain or prove the main idea. These sentences present facts, reasons, examples, definitions, comparison, contrasts, and other pertinent details. They are most important because they sell the main idea. The last sentence of a paragraph is likely to be a concluding sentence. It is used to sum up a discussion, to emphasize a point, or to restate all or part of the topic sentence so as to bring the paragraph to a close. The last sentence may also be a transitional sentence leading to the next paragraph.

Of course, the paragraphs you'll be reading will be part of some longer piece of writing – a textbook chapter, a section of a chapter, or a newspaper or magazine article. Besides expository paragraphs, in which new information is presented and discussed, these longer writings contain three types of paragraphs: introductory, transitional, and summarizing.

Introductory paragraphs tell you, in advance, such things as (1) the main ideas of the chapter or section; (2) the extent or limits of the coverage; (3) how the topic is developed; and (4) the writer's attitude toward the topic.

Transitional paragraphs are usually short; their sole function is to tie together what you have read so far and what is to come – to set the stage for succeeding ideas of the chapter or section.

Summarizing paragraphs are used to restate briefly the main ideas of the chapter or section. The writer may also draw some conclusion from these ideas, or speculate on some conclusion based on the evidence he/she has presented.

All three types should alert you: the introductory paragraph of things to come; the transitional paragraph of a new topic; and the summarizing paragraph of main ideas that you should have gotten.

Exercise:

Read the following paragraph and underline the stated main idea. Write down in your own words what you are able to conclude from the information.

The rules of conduct during an examination are clear. No books, calculators or papers are allowed in the test room. Proctors will not allow anyone with such items to take the test. Anyone caught cheating will be asked to leave the room. His or her test sheet will be taken. The incident will be reported to the proper authority. At the end of the test period, all materials will be returned to the proctor. Failure to abide by these rules will result in a failing grade for this test.

Answer:

You should have underlined the first sentence in the paragraph – this is the stated main idea. What can be concluded from the information is: If you do not follow the rules, you will automatically fail the test. This concluding information is found in the last sentence.

You can't comprehend the subject matter if you haven't identified the topic, the main idea, and the supporting details.

Source:

https://www.cuesta.edu/student/resources/ssc/study_guides/reading_comp/307_read_main_idea.html

<https://helpyourselfenglish.wordpress.com/paragraphs-identifying-the-main-idea/>



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