

Intermediate Reading

Main Idea and Supporting Sentences

Session 3

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Learning Outcomes

- Students are able to recognize main idea and supporting sentences

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

What is the Topic?

- 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:
- Look for repeated words or phrases
- What is the author talking about all through the text?
- 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.

Main Idea

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?

- 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

How to Find the Main Idea

1) *Identify the Topic*

Read the passage through completely, then try to identify the topic.

2) *Summarize the Passage*

After reading the passage thoroughly, summarize it in your own words in **one sentence**.

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.

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.

The key steps to finding the main idea:

- Read the whole paragraph
- Identify the different types of sentences present within the paragraph, such as topic sentence, example, explanation or statistic.
- Identify the main topic and what the writer is saying about the topic. This will be the main idea.
- 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.
- Check if the examples and details support this main idea.
- What point(s) has the most supporting details?

What are supporting details?

- A paragraph contains details that support 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.

Examples of details are: facts, statements, examples.

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

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.
- 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.

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.
- 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.
- 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.