

READING

Finding Main Ideas

- The main idea is the central, or the most important, idea in a paragraph or text. It states the purpose and sets the direction of the paragraph or passage.
- The main idea may be stated or it may be implied.

- When the main idea of a paragraph is stated, it is most often found in the first sentence of the paragraph. However, the main idea may be found in any sentence of the paragraph.
- The main idea may be stated in the first sentence of a paragraph, and then be repeated or restated at the end of the paragraph.

- The main idea may be split. The first sentence of a paragraph may present a point of view, while the last sentence presents a contrasting or opposite view.
- To find the main idea of any paragraph or passage, ask these questions:
 1. Who or what is the paragraph about?
 2. What aspect or idea about the 'who' or 'what' is the author concerned with?

Main Idea Practice Paragraphs

Read and think about the following sample paragraphs, in which the main idea sentences are underlined.

Paragraph 1

- It is often said that lightning never strikes twice in the same place, but this isn't true. Go ask the forest rangers. Rangers who spend their summers as fire-fighters will tell you that every thundershower brings several bolts of lightning to their lookout stations.

(Notice that the first sentence tells what the paragraph is about; the sentences that follow support the idea stated in the first sentence.)

Paragraph 2

- Costs were low that year and output high. There was a good person for each job and the market remained firm. There were no losses from fire. All in all, it was the best years in the history of the company.

(Note that the first three sentences give details to explain why it was the best year in the company's history.)

Paragraph 3

- There are great numbers of deer around here. This whole area is great country for hunters and fishermen. There are bears, mountain lions, and coyotes. To the east there are streams full of trout, and there are ducks and geese.

(The author begins and ends with examples. The main idea is stated in the second sentence.)

Paragraph 4

- Advertising affects our lives everyday. Brand names are common household words. We start each day using the toothpaste, soap, and breakfast foods promoted by advertisers. Ads have made the cars we drive signs of our success. Our choices of food, dress, and entertainment are swayed by ads. Not one aspect of American life is untouched by advertising.

(The main idea is stated at the beginning of the paragraph and then restated at the end.)

Paragraph 5

- Penicilin is one of the greatest of the wonder drugs. It has saved thousands of lives already and will save many more in the future. Unfortunately it has no effect at all on most of the ills of mankind. Penicilin is a very good drug, but it is certainly not a cure-all.

(The author has split the main idea. This paragraph begins with positive comments on penicilin. The word 'but' signals a shift in thought, and the paragraph ends with a statement of its limitations.)

Paragraph 6

- Do you wear glasses? Make sure your glasses fit well. The earpieces should be at eye level. Don't try to adjust the earpieces yourself. Take your glasses for adjustments to the place you bought them. Keep your glasses in a case when you are not wearing them. This will prevent scratches. Keep the lenses clean. A soft is best for cleaning.

(The main idea is implied. All of the sentences in the paragraph give details about a main idea. In this paragraph the implied main idea is that taking care of your glasses involves many steps.)