



Reading for the Main Idea

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WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA?

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

WHERE CAN I FIND THE MAIN IDEA?

- It is easy to identify one 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.
- The main idea is not always clearly stated. It is more difficult to identify a main idea when it is implied through other words in the paragraph. An implied main idea can be found in several ways.
 - Several sentences in a paragraph can imply the main idea by introducing facts about the topic before actually stating the topic.
 - Implied ideas can be drawn from facts, reasons, or examples that give hints or suggestions concerning the main idea. These hints will be clues leading you to discover the main idea in the selected text.
- Use the hints below to determine the correct main idea of this paragraph.
 - After reading a paragraph ask, "What point is the author making in this passage?"
 - Ask the following questions:

Who - Does this passage discuss a person or group of people?

When - Does the information contain a reference to time?

Where - Does the text name a place?

Why - Do you find a reason or explanation for something that happened?

How - Does this information indicate a method or a theory?

HOW CAN I TELL I HAVE FOUND THE MAIN IDEA?

- If you are able to summarize the information in the passage in your own words, you have absorbed the correct main idea. To do this, try the steps listed below after reading a short section of your textbook.
 - Write a short summary in your own words about what you have read.
 - Does your summary contain the same ideas being expressed by the author?
 - Could you write a headline (or textbook subheading) that would express your summary in less than five words?
- Also, if you are able to rephrase your choice of a topic sentence into a question and then determine if the passage answers your question, you have been successful at selecting a main idea.

READ THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND LOCATE THE MAIN IDEA:

A. Despite the hatred that most people feel toward cockroaches, they do help humans in several ways. For example, they are perfect experimental animals and are used for scientific research in the laboratory. Breeding them is easy, for they thrive under almost any conditions. In studies on nutrition and food, cockroaches are good subjects because they will eat any kind of food. They can be used to study heart disease, and cancer researchers work with roaches because they grow cancerous tumors like those that are found in humans.

- 1) in the first sentence**
- 2) in the last sentence**
- 3) in the middle of the paragraph**
- 4) in two sentences of the paragraph**
- 5) not stated in the paragraph directly (implied)**

B. About 300 million years ago, long before dinosaurs ruled the earth, the cockroach already had been here for a long time. We can only guess at why it has not become extinct, but the physical assets of the cockroach provide a major reason for its survival. The cockroach's body is very flat, allowing it to slip into tiny cracks and crevices, and its six strong running legs give it unmatched powers of escape. Two small feelers detect movements and changes in air currents, thus warning the insect of approaching danger. The cockroach's two large eyes are made up of hundreds of tiny, separate eyes which are very good for seeing movements - an ability that helps a roach escape its enemies.

- 1) in the first sentence**
- 2) in the last sentence**
- 3) in the middle of the paragraph**
- 4) in two sentences of the paragraph**
- 5) not stated in the paragraph directly (implied)**

C. Making a study schedule is one important step in becoming a successful student in college. Students should schedule one hour of study time for every one hour of class time. At exam time, more study time may be necessary. Also, students must study in an appropriate place. It is important to study in a quiet place away from the distraction of other people and such things as the television and the radio. Students should find a comfortable place with plenty of space for all the necessary study supplies. Then, students need to study the information in small amounts. It is a good idea to learn the required concepts slowly and thoroughly instead of trying to learn everything on the evening before the exam. Students who want to be successful in college should remember these three helpful study strategies.

- 1) in the first sentence**
- 2) in the last sentence**
- 3) in the middle of the paragraph**
- 4) in two sentences of the paragraph**
- 5) not stated in the paragraph directly (implied)**

D. Every game from the latest multimedia games to old favorites like cards and chess can be played on home computers. Home computers are used to balance family finances, to complete banking transactions, and even to do the grocery shopping. Those computers which are equipped with a modem allow users to go "online" to "chat" with others -- that is, people can have a conversation on the computer about anything from being in love to getting medical advice. And of course students use home computers to type up school reports, to research their papers for classes and even to do the calculations for math homework.

- 1) in the first sentence
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- 4) in two sentences of the paragraph
- 5) not stated in the paragraph directly (implied)

E. Television can be an excellent teacher for everyone from very young children to the oldest of viewers. Television entertains young children with sights and songs. Television provides company for older viewers who are stuck at home with no one to talk to. New immigrants can learn English just by turning on the television. All viewers can keep informed on the latest events around the world by watching the news. While there are many great things about television, there are also many bad things. Over time, television shows have begun to show more and more violence, death and murder. The bad language and profanity on some shows make them unsuitable for families. The number of shows which deal with sex outside of marriage also shocks many viewers. And these terrible scenes are sometimes copied by young, impressionable viewers.

- 1) in the first sentence
- 2) in the last sentence
- 3) in the middle of the paragraph
- 4) in two sentences of the paragraph
- 5) not stated in the paragraph directly (implied)

Correct Answers: A.) 1 B.) 4 C.) 4 D.) 5 E.) 3

