

Department of English

Module: RT

Level: 1st Year

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Exercises about Reading Paragraphs Techniques

The Main Idea

Exercise: Read the following paragraphs and carefully determine what the *main idea* is for each. The best way to approach these questions is to first read the paragraph and then, in your own words, restate what you think the author is trying to say. From the five choices, select the one statement that best supports the author's point.

1-The best recipes for clam chowder all include onions and a bay leaf. The onions add a sharpness and zest to the blandness of the clams, and also help remove their slimy texture. The bay leaf complements the onion's strong flavor.

This paragraph best supports the statement that

- a.** onions were once thought to be poisonous.
- b.** bay leaves are essential in many soups.
- c.** clam chowder is very nutritious.
- d.** onions and bay leaves go well with clams.
- e.** clams should not be overcooked.

2- One New York publisher has estimated that 50,000 to 60,000 people in the United States want an anthology that includes the complete works of William Shakespeare. And what accounts for this renewed interest in Shakespeare? As scholars point out, the psychological insights he portrays in both male and female characters are amazing even today.

This paragraph best supports the statement that

- a.** Shakespeare's characters are more interesting than fictional characters today.
- b.** people today are interested in Shakespeare's work because of the characters.
- c.** academic scholars are putting together an anthology of Shakespeare's work.
- d.** New Yorkers have a renewed interest in the work of Shakespeare.
- e.** Shakespeare was a psychiatrist as well as a playwright.

3- Critical reading is a demanding process. To read critically, you must slow down your reading and, with pencil in hand, perform specific operations on the text. Mark up the text with your reactions, conclusions, and questions. When you read, become an active participant.

This paragraph best supports the statement that

- a.** critical reading is a slow, dull, but essential process.
- b.** the best critical reading happens at critical times in a person's life.
- c.** readers should get in the habit of questioning the truth of what they read.
- d.** critical reading requires thoughtful and careful attention.
- e.** critical reading should take place at the same time each day.

4- There are no effective boundaries when it comes to pollutants. Studies have shown that toxic insecticides that have been banned in many countries are riding the wind from countries where they remain legal. Compounds such as DDT and toxaphene have been found in remote places like the Yukon and other Arctic regions.

This paragraph best supports the statement that

- a.** toxic insecticides such as DDT have not been banned throughout the world.
- b.** more pollutants find their way into polar climates than they do into warmer areas.
- c.** studies have proven that many countries have ignored their own anti-pollution laws.
- d.** DDT and toxaphene are the two most toxic insecticides in the world.
- e.** even a worldwide ban on toxic insecticides would not stop the spread of DDT pollution.

5- Mathematics allows us to expand our consciousness. Mathematics tells us about economic trends, patterns of disease, and the growth of populations. Math is good at exposing the truth, but it can also perpetuate misunderstandings and untruths. Figures have the power to mislead people.

This paragraph best supports the statement that

- a.** the study of mathematics is dangerous.
- b.** words are more truthful than figures.
- c.** the study of mathematics is more important than other disciplines.
- d.** the power of numbers is that they cannot lie.
- e.** figures are sometimes used to deceive people.

6- Black-and-white camera film, in the old days of film photography, was very sensitive to blue light but not to red light. Blue skies would often show very little detail, because the film couldn't record all that it was seeing. To compensate, photographers would put a red filter on the lens, darkening the sky enough that the film could record its fluffy clouds.

This paragraph best supports the statement that

- a.** red filters were very popular in the old days of photography.
- b.** infrared rays are invisible to the naked eye.
- c.** black-and-white photography used to be very popular.
- d.** red filters cut out some blue light on black and white film.
- e.** blue filters cut out red light.

7- Today's postal service is more efficient than ever. Mail that once took months to move by horse and foot now moves around the country in days or hours by truck, train, and plane. If your letter or package is urgent, the U.S. Postal Service offers Priority Mail and Express Mail services. Priority Mail is guaranteed to go anywhere in the United States in two days or less. Express Mail will get your package there overnight.

This paragraph best supports the statement that

- a.** more people use the post office for urgent deliveries than any other delivery service.
- b.** Express Mail is a good way to send urgent mail.
- c.** Priority Mail usually takes two days or less.
- d.** mail service today is more effective and dependable.
- e.** mail was once delivered by horse and foot

The Topic Sentence

- **For the following three questions, choose the topic sentence that best fits the paragraph:**

1-The term *spices* is a pleasant one, whether it connotes fine French cuisine or a down-home, cinnamon-flavored apple pie._____. In the past, individuals traveled the world seeking exotic spices for profit and, in searching, have changed the course of history. Indeed, to gain control of lands harboring new spices, nations have actually gone to war.

- a.** The taste and aroma of spices are the main elements that make food such a source of fascination and pleasure.
- b.** The term might equally bring to mind Indian curry made thousands of miles away and those delicious barbecued ribs sold on the corner.
- c.** It is exciting to find a good cookbook and experiment with spices from other lands—indeed, it is one way to travel around the globe!
- d.** The history of spices, however, is another matter altogether, and at times, it can be filled with danger and intrigue.

2-It weighs less than three pounds and is hardly more interesting to look at than an overly ripe cauliflower. _____. It has created poetry and music, planned and executed horrific wars, and devised intricate scientific theories. It thinks and dreams, plots and schemes, and easily holds more information than all the libraries on Earth.

- a.** The human brain is made of gelatinous matter and contains no nerve endings.
- b.** The science of neurology has found a way to map the most important areas of the human brain.
- c.** Nevertheless, the human brain is the most mysterious and complex object on Earth.
- d.** However, scientists say that each person uses only 10% of his or her brain over the course of a lifetime!

3-_____. It rained in April; it rained in May. It rained in the mornings; it rained in the afternoons. It poured, it drizzled, it showered, it misted—but always it rained. But the good news is we won't have a drought this summer.

- a.** The rain makes me gloomy.
- b.** This spring was the rainiest on record.
- c.** Rain is nice, but I prefer sunshine.

d. Scientists know very little about the global climate.

***For the following questions, a topic sentence is given. Try choosing the sentence that best develops or supports it.**

1. A fireplace should be lined with special fire bricks to prevent heat transfer.

a. Normal bricks are not dense enough to withstand excessive heat.

b. Fire codes also require a smoke alarm in every room.

c. Good up-drafts can make a pleasant fire, however.

d. Modern houses don't use as much lumber as older homes did.

2. Cosmetic plastic surgery is one of the fastest-growing segments of U.S. medicine.

a. Cosmetic plastic surgery can have dangerous side effects, some of which can be fatal.

b. Americans are eager to make their bodies as perfect as possible and to minimize the visible signs of aging.

c. The price of cosmetic plastic surgery is also on the rise.

d. This increase in cosmetic plastic surgery says something quite disturbing about our culture.

3. If a car suddenly begins to skid on ice, a driver's instinctive reaction might be the wrong one.

a. Skids can be a terrifying experience.

b. Cars can be very unpredictable on ice.

c. Many people instinctively turn the wheel in the wrong direction, making the skid worse.

d. New tires can help reduce the risk of skidding on ice.

4. The "lead" inside the common pencil is actually not lead at all.

a. Lead is commonly mined in Africa.

b. Pencils were invented in 1603 by William Ledbelly.

c. Even when sharpened, a pencil may not write as well as a pen.

d. The substance used in pencils today is graphite.

5. The Greek ideal of the hero most closely resembles today's free agent superstar.

a. A superstar is an athlete who commands a great salary based on his individual skills.

b. The Greek warrior's focus was on grasping at immortality, and he did this by ensuring that his name would live on, long after he died.

c. The Greek hero valued self-interest above loyalty to a cause, his king, or to his army, just as the free-agent superstar values his contract salary above any special team, coach, or the game.

d. The Greek hero was impressive in his performance on the battlefield as well as in the sports arena.

6. There is no instruction by the old bird in the movements of flight; no conscious imitation by the young.

a. The most obvious way in which birds differ from humans in behavior is that they can do all that they have to do, without ever being taught.

b. More extraordinary than the fact that a bird is able to fly untaught, is that it is able to build a nest untaught.

c. Young birds frequently make their first flights with their parents out of sight.

d. Young birds brought up in artificial environments will build the proper kind of nest for their species when the time comes.

7. Parents play an important role in their children's academic success.

a. Video games have a negative impact on children's academic success.

b. Studies show that children of parents who regularly assist with homework and show an active interest in their child's studies bring home better grades.

c. Studies show that watching less television and spending less time playing video games help children get better grades.

d. Children who are avid readers get much better grades than their peers.

8. In special cases, needy people who have nowhere else to go are permitted to enter the United States as refugees.

a. Other people, however, enter the United States illegally.

b. The total number of newcomers was over one million.

c. United States immigration laws put limits on the number of people permitted to enter the United States.

d. As many as 12 million people may be living in the United States illegally.

9. Most common weed killers work by poisoning the root of the plant.

a. Weed killer can be dangerous to pets.

b. Some weeds can grow even during drought.

c. When using weed killer, always wear gloves.

d. The poison is absorbed by the leaves and carried down to the roots.

10. More and more people are eating organically grown fruits and vegetables.

a. Organic food is usually more expensive than non-organic food.

b. A wide variety of organic chocolate products are now available in stores.

c. Raw foods are enjoying increasing popularity, now that people are discovering how a raw-foods diet leaves you feeling and looking great.

d. Fresh organic produce contains more vitamins, minerals, and enzymes than non-organic produce.

11. In Oklahoma, a girl is forbidden to take a bite from her date's hamburger.

a. It's illegal for teenagers to take a bath during the winter in Clinton, Indiana.

b. Youngsters may not spin Yo-Yos on Sunday in Memphis, Tennessee.

c. It may be hard to believe, but these types of strange laws are still on the books!

d. It is illegal to parade an elephant down Main Street in Austin, Texas.

12. A cat's whiskers are among the most perfect organs of touch.

a. The hairs themselves are very sensitive.

b. Whiskers are generally white in color.

c. Touch is very important to a cat.

d. Dogs have very sensitive noses.

13. French explorers probably taught the Inuit Eskimos how to play dominoes.

a. It was known in 181 a.d. in China.

b. Also, it was played during the eighteenth century in Italy.

c. The game of dominoes has been popular for centuries.

d. From Italy, it was then introduced to the rest of the world.

Patterns of Organization

EXERCISE 1

A. Each paragraph has a different pattern. Working with another student, read the paragraphs and write the topic, the main idea, the key words in the main idea, and the pattern. Then add the supporting facts and ideas as shown in the examples.

• Listing, Sequence, Comparison/Contrast or Cause/Effect patterns: Signal words and details

• Problem/Solution pattern: The problem and the solution

• Extended Definition pattern: Explanation and/or description

Moon Landings

1. Only three and a half years passed between the first moon landing in 1969 and the sixth and last moon landing in 1972. But while the first landing was an enormous achievement in itself, the last landing contributed far more to the advancement of scientific knowledge. On the first mission, the two astronauts

were on the Moon for only a few hours and remained close to the landing site. Their time on the Moon was just sufficient to conduct several experiments and collect a small sample of lunar rocks. On the last mission, however, the three men (one of whom was a geologist) spent much more time on the lunar surface—three periods of about seven hours. With their special moon vehicle, they could travel much further from the landing site to investigate more of the lunar environment and collect a wider range of soil and rock samples.

Topic:

Main idea:

Key words in the main idea:

Pattern:

Supporting facts and ideas:

2. The Apollo moon landings, may not have led to any great discovery—such as evidence of life on the Moon—but it did have a significant impact on scientific and technological development in the twentieth century. One field that was undoubtedly affected by the moon landings was computer research. NASA, the U.S. space agency, did not invent the integrated circuit (the basis of the computer), but it was the largest single consumer of integrated circuits in the early 1960s. Working for the space program undoubtedly motivated computer engineers, pushing them toward the development of today's personal computer. Another, related technological development that could be attributed at least in part to the Apollo program was the invention of the Internet. In this case, too, the moon landings served as an indirect motivation for scientists and engineers in their search for ways to communicate from computers in spacecraft to computers on Earth.

1 evidence: use: facts, objects, or signs that make you believe that something exists or is true

2 integrated circuit: very small electronic parts working together as a single unit in a computer *consumer*

Topic:

Main idea:

Key words in the main idea:

Pattern:

Supporting facts and ideas:

3. In planning for future lunar missions, scientists are faced with one serious limitation to human exploration on the Moon, and that is the lack of water. The

availability of water would make an enormous difference for humans working on the Moon for any length of time. The search for water, then, remains a high priority for space scientists. One technique that they have used is to send rockets crashing into the lunar surface. The crash creates a cloud of vapor' and dust that scientists can collect and analyze for evidence of water. Several rockets have already been sent to the Moon, but so far the results have not been conclusive. Another larger and heavier rocket, which will be sent to the moon in 2009, will have a greater impact and may produce different results. With the data from this larger rocket blast, scientists hope to establish conclusively the presence or absence of water on the Moon

vapor: a mass of very small drops of a liquid that floats in the air

Topic:

Main idea:

Key words in the main idea:

Pattern:

Supporting facts and ideas:

4. Lunar craters make travel on the Moon's surface a challenge for astronauts or robotic rovers. The surface of the Moon is marked by millions of the deep depressions or holes which are visible from the earth with just the naked eye. The craters are generally circular, range in size from a few feet to many hundreds of kilometers across, and can be surrounded by sharp mountainous peaks. They have been created by the impact of various objects—asteroids, comets, or meteorites. Since the Moon has no atmosphere to protect it from potentially dangerous objects in space, it is exposed to anything that may be in its path. The fact that there is no atmosphere on the Moon, and so no wind or rain, also means that the craters remain unchanged unless another object lands in the same spot.

Topic:

Main idea:

Key words in the main idea:

Pattern:

Supporting facts and ideas: