

Larbi Ben M'hidi University- Oum El Bouaghi
Department of English
Course Title: READING
Level: First Year-LMD
Teacher: Mrs. Soumia BOUAZIZ

MAIN IDEA

Objective: The students will determine **the main idea** of a paragraph.

In order to become a better and faster reader, recognizing the main idea is the most important skill you can develop. Think of the main idea as an umbrella--it is the author's primary point about a topic. All other material in the paragraph fits under the main idea.

Find the Main Idea

- “What does the author want me to know about the topic?” or “What is the author teaching me?”
- Look for a sentence that states the main idea. This is the stated main idea or topic sentence.
- At times the main idea will not be stated directly. This is called an implied main idea.
- Avoid detail. Think of a general statement that could sum up the specifics as effectively as any stated topic sentence. Your main idea will include the topic and the central point that the author expresses.

Consider this example:

Does watching violence on TV make people more prone to violence themselves? Obviously, TV violence has some negative effects. One study found that heavy TV watchers are more fearful of others. They try to protect themselves with guns, alarm systems, and security locks on doors. In the same study it was found that heavy TV watchers are less upset about real-life violence than are non-TV watchers. All of the violence they see on TV makes them less sensitive to the real thing. A recent study also found that TV violence increases aggressive behavior in kids and makes them more likely to select toy guns rather than other kinds of toys.

Topic: TV violence Notice that the subject of the 1st sentence is repeated throughout the paragraph, and ALL sentences in the paragraph deal with “TV violence.”

Stated Main Idea: Obviously, TV violence has some negative effects.

This paragraph has a stated main idea (topic sentence). Sentence 2 is a general summary statement of the topic (TV violence) and the author’s central point (negative effects).

Practice I: *Each paragraph is followed by four statements. Select the statement that best expresses the main idea. Circle the letter of that statement.*

1.The fact that electronic computers are now used for data processing has led the general public to believe that it is a mysterious, complicated science and that the computers are giant brains. Both of these ideas are false. A computer is basically just a high-speed adding machine that performs the functions it is told to. If the input data are varied even a little, the computer is unable to operate until it is programmed to accept the variations. The business operations it performs are impressive only because of the extremely high speed of manipulation, but most of these operations have been used for decades. Unlike man, the computer performs repetitive calculations without getting tired or bored.

- a.** A computer is a high-speed adding machine.
- b.** A computer is a mysterious giant brain.
- c.** A computer is impressive because of its high speed.
- d.** A computer is superior to man in many ways.

2. Most children have an interest in learning to play a musical instrument at one point or another during their growing-up years. Parents need to take advantage of that urge to play when it appears. Some very small children become intrigued with music because they see their parents or their older siblings play. The Suzuki method of instruction capitalizes on that early willingness to learn by involving the parent and the child in the child's instructions. Elementary-aged youngsters often are exposed to stringed instruments or band instruments in their school music classes. Because kids like to do what other kids do, parents who are not musicians themselves can take

advantage of both instruction and enthusiasm. It is at the middle school level, however, that peer pressure can really work to the benefit of parents who want to hear the sound of music around the house.

a. most children have an interest in learning to play a musical instrument during their growing-up years.

b. some very small children become intrigued with music because they see their parents or siblings play.

c. at various points, parents can take advantage of their children's desire to play a musical instrument.

d. middle-school children take delight at selecting and learning to play an instrument along with their friends.

3. In earlier days those who had overseas business which they believed should be discussed personally, took ship and set out across the briny deep. Once aboard they transacted their affairs, engaging in commercial and social matters or conducting government business. Today ships and passengers continue to sail the seven seas, and airplanes soar overhead. But above them all, words speed through the sky—telephone conversations quickly bring together in the most personal fashion people who are separated by thousands of miles.

a. Overseas telephone service today is ruling out all need for overseas travel.

b. Nothing can take the place of person-to-person conversation in settling business, social, and government problems.

c. Many conversations which once required overseas travel can now be conducted by telephone.

d. Even with modern overseas telephone service people continue to travel abroad by ship or by plane.

4. Sometimes too much of a good thing can become a very bad thing indeed. In an earnest attempt to consume a healthy diet, dietary supplement enthusiasts have been known to overdose. Vitamin C, for example, long thought to help people ward off cold viruses, is currently being studied for its possible role in warding off cancer and other diseases that cause tissue degeneration. Unfortunately, an overdose of vitamin C – more than 10,000 mg. – on a daily basis can cause nausea and diarrhea. Calcium supplements, commonly taken by women, are helpful in warding off osteoporosis. More than just a few grams a day, however, can lead to stomach upset and even kidney or bladder stones. Niacin, proven useful in reducing cholesterol levels, can be dangerous in large doses to those who suffer from heart problems, asthma, or ulcers.

a. supplements taken in excess can be a bad thing indeed.

b. dietary supplement enthusiasts have been known to overdose.

c. vitamins can cause nausea, diarrhea, and kidney or bladder stones.

d. people who take supplements are preoccupied with their health.

Practice II: *Look at each of the following four paragraphs and then write the main idea in the space provided.*

1. People lie for different reasons. One common reason is to avoid hurting someone's feelings. For example, a friend might ask, "Do you like my new haircut?" If you think it is ugly, you might still answer,

“Yes.” Another common reason for lying is to avoid a fight. Say a friend angers you and then asks, “Are you upset with me?” You might answer, “No,” to avoid an argument. People also lie so that they will fit in, as when you listen to a boring person and politely say, “That is interesting.” In addition, people lie to avoid spending more time with someone. For instance, you might lie, “I have to go now.”

Main Idea:
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2.You do not have to scare your family with statistics about heart attacks. There are several positive ways to encourage your family to exercise more often. To begin with, get them to exercise more often by emphasizing how good they will feel and how much better they will look if they work out on a regular basis. A second method you can use is to set an example. If they see you walking to stores rather than driving, they might be encouraged to do likewise. Finally, make exercise a family activity. Suggest that the whole family go hiking or camping together, take up early morning jogging, or join the Y at the group rate.

Main Idea:
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3.Serious depression, as opposed to the fleeting kind we all feel at times, has definite warning signs. One symptom of depression is a change in sleep patterns—either sleeplessness or sleeping too much. In addition, abnormal eating patterns may develop, either eating too much or loss of appetite. A third sign is trouble in thinking or

concentrating—even to the point of finding it difficult to read a magazine or newspaper. And last of all, a general feeling of hopelessness may signal depression. People feel indifferent to their families and jobs and may begin to think that life is not worth living.

Main Idea:

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4.Several factors can interfere with having a good memory. For one thing, there can be a lack of motivation. Without a real desire to learn or remember something, you probably will not. Also, a factor is a lack of practice. To stay sharp, memory skills, like any other skill, must be used on a regular basis. Yet another factor that can hurt memory is self-doubt. If you are convinced you will not remember something, you probably will not. In addition, distraction can interfere with memory. If you are distracted by a television or by conversation nearby, try to find a quiet environment before trying to commit something to memory.

Main Idea:

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Reference:

Mikulecky, B.S. & Jeffries, L (1986). Reading power : Reading faster, thinking skills, reading for pleasure, comprehension skills. USA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.