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How can a reader identify the main idea and supporting details of a text

Supporting Details Learning Objective: Identify supporting details in a reading. LESSONIn this lesson, you will learn how to identify the supporting detailsStatements within a reading that tie directly to major details that support the main idea. These can be provided in examples, statistics, anecdotes, definitions, descriptions, or comparisons within the work. of a readingA piece of writing to be read. A reading can either be a full work (i.e., a book) or partial (i.e., a passage).. Writers use supporting details to give readers more information about their topicsThe subject of a reading, and main ideasThe most important or central thought of a reading selection. It also includes what the author wants the reader to understand about the topic he or she has chosen to write about.. Supporting details help readers answer questions they have about the topic or main idea. A writer may use examples, statistics, anecdotesA brief, interesting story that writers often use to demonstrate a point within a work. (short, interesting stories), definitions, comparisons, or other forms of support to explain a reading's topic or main idea. There are two types of supporting details: major and minor. Major supporting detailsStatements within a reading that tie directly to the work's main idea. These can be provided in examples, statistics, anecdotes, definitions, descriptions, or comparisons within the work. are directly tied to the main idea. Minor supporting detailsSmaller statements within a reading that tie directly to major details, are directly tied to major details.For example, if you are reading about tornadoes (the main idea), a major detail might be that certain locations on the planet help create tornadoes, and a minor detail would be that "tornado alley," found on the plains of the United States, is where the most tornadoes form.Supporting Details ProcessUse a three-step process to identify supporting details.Step 1: Identify the topic. To identify the topic of a reading, ask yourself, "What is this about?" The answer provides the topic of the reading. It does not need to be a complete sentence, and it is usually no longer than two or three words.Step 2: Identify what the author is saying about the topic. To identify what the author is saying about the topic, ask yourself, "What does the author want me to know about the topic?" Again, this does not need to be a sentence and is generally five to seven words long.Step 3: Identify details that support or explain the main idea. To find the main idea, first take your answer from Step 1, add it to your answer from Step 2, and then find a phraseA set of words that express an idea. A phrase may or may not form a complete sentence, or sentence in the first part of the reading that most closely matches your answers. This will be the main idea of the reading. To identify major supporting details that support that main idea, ask yourself, "What else in the reading helps me to understand the author's main idea?" To identify minor supporting details, ask of each major detail, "What else in the paragraph helps me to understand this major supporting detail?" Be aware that not all major details require further explanation, so they will not all have minor details supporting them.+ PRACTICAL APPLICATIONLearning how to identify supporting details will enable you to more easily uncover the main idea of a text, be it a reading or an advertisement on television. This will help you understand exactly what the author or advertiser is trying to say.+ EXAMPLERead the following passageA short portion of a writing taken from a larger source, such as a book, article, speech, or poem. and see how the Supporting Details Process identifies the supporting details.Finding meaningful work requires a thorough job search. There are three main ways to search for such a job. In today's technological world, most people start their job search on the Internet. Many websites are available with job postings, descriptions, and contact information for job seekers. Another way to find a job is to talk to people in the field of interest. This allows a job seeker to ask questions, gain information, and discuss opportunities. Finally, a person looking for a meaningful job might first take an internship or apprenticeship in the field in which they are interested. This allows job seekers to get hands-on experience. By searching the Internet, talking to people in the field, or taking an internship, job seekers can find meaningful, fulfilling work.Step 1: Identify the topic.Job searchingStep 2: Identify what the author is saying about the topic.The author wants me to know about ways to search for a meaningful job.Step 3: Identify details that support or explain the main idea.Combining Step 1 with Step 2 and looking back to the reading provides the main idea: There are three main ways to search for a meaningful job.This main idea statement generates the question: What are the three ways to search for a job? The answers to the question provide the supporting details of the paragraph.Major Detail: Job search on the InternetMinor Detail: Many websites with job postings, descriptions, and contact informationMajor Detail: Talk to people in the field of interestMinor Detail: Ask questions, gain information, and discuss opportunitiesMajor Detail: Take an internship or apprenticeshipMinor Detail: Get hands-on experience+ YOUR TURNRead the following paragraph and use the Supporting Details Process to identify the major and minor supporting details of the paragraph.Deciding to go to college is a big step for most people. One of the most important decisions to consider is choosing between an online education and a traditional education. An online education happens wherever the student has Internet access, offers a flexible arrangement that can fit with work schedules, and often allows students to work at their own pace. A major disadvantage is that it requires access to technology and a reliable Internet connection. A traditional, classroom-based education provides students face-to-face access to their instructor, the ability to work with peers, and a structured class meeting schedule. Of course, it also requires specific time out of every week, which can be difficult for people with a varied work schedule. It is important for students to consider all aspects of both types of education and how each fits their personality and educational needs before deciding which format is best for them.Step 1: Identify the topic.What is the topic?Online education vs. traditional educationStep 2: Identify what the author is saying about the topic.What does the author want you to know about this topic?The author wants me to know about the differences between online education and traditional education.Step 3: Identify details that support or explain the main idea.What is the main idea of the reading?There are important decisions to consider when choosing between an online education and a traditional education.What are the major and minor details that support the main idea?Major Detail: An online education happens wherever a student has Internet access, offers a flexible arrangement that can fit with work schedules, and often allows students to work at their own pace.Minor Detail: It requires access to technology and a reliable Internet connection.Major Detail: A traditional education offers students face-to-face access to their instructor, the ability to work with peers, and a structured class meeting schedule.Minor Detail: It requires specific time out of every week.+ METACOGNITIVE QUESTIONSNow that you can identify supporting details in a reading, how will understanding major and minor details help with your writing?Knowing about major and minor details will help me organize my writing so that minor details are linked to the major details and the major details are linked to the main idea.What type of advertisements on television try to get you to ignore the major and minor details of the ad?Car commercials always talk quickly through the details of their offers, making them seem like much better deals than they actually are.Copyright ©2021 The NROC Project In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. If you're seeing this message, it means we're having trouble loading external resources on our website. If you're behind a web filter, please make sure that the domains *kastatic.org and *ksandbox.org are unblocked. We have all been there, though it can often feel as futile as the search for that proverbial needle in a haystack... Finding the main idea of a piece of writing can be a challenge, but it is an essential reading comprehension skill for our students to develop. Students that become skilled in this art will benefit from it far beyond the perimeters of the school gates. From the small print of an insurance document to writing a book review, the ability to filter a text and identify its central idea is as much a crucial life skill as an essential literacy-based learning objective. Though it isn't always easy, luckily there is much we can do to help our students hone their abilities in this area. WHAT IS 'THE MAIN IDEA'? DEFINITION Whether we are talking about the main idea of a paragraph, a poem, a chapter, or a longer text, finding the main idea requires the reader to identify the topic of a piece of writing and then uncover what the writer wants us to know about that topic. As is so often the case, it is best to start small. When working with students on how to identify the main idea, begin by having students locate the main idea in a sentence before building up to locating it in a longer paragraph. As students gradually build their confidence in identifying the main idea in paragraphs, they will soon be ready to move onto longer texts in the form of chapters and eventually full-length books. A WORD ON PARAGRAPHS READ OUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO PARAGRAPHS HERE The main idea of a sentence is usually fairly straightforward to identify. Often it is as simple as identifying the subject of the sentence. Whole chapters or books, on the other hand, can seldom be easily reduced to expression in the form of a single, main idea. For these reasons, the paragraph offers the student the most suitable format in which to practice their main idea identification skills. Usually, if the writer knows what they are doing, we can identify a single main idea in every paragraph. We can think of this as the key point that is usually expressed in the form of a topic sentence. It is often found in the paragraph's first sentence, with subsequent sentences providing the supporting details. It can, however, occur in the middle, at the end, or even be split across the paragraph. It may even not be there at all - at least not explicitly. Writers are a creative bunch, and so students will require more sophisticated means to accurately identify the main idea in all cases and that is exactly what this article will help you help your students to do. HOW IS A MAIN IDEA EXPRESSED? It can appear to be a fairly clear-cut task to define the main idea, so why is it often so problematic for students to identify it? Well, the truth is that it needn't be so. Often the central concept is expressed directly in the text and is as easy to identify as your own face in the mirror. However, the main idea will not always be expressed so explicitly and students must learn to identify it whether it is expressed directly or merely implied if they are to fully comprehend what they are reading. THE STATEMENT OF THE MAIN IDEA Attention is the key to pulling the main idea from a text, whatever the genre. Students need to identify the most relevant information from the work and use it to develop a statement that expresses what they perceive the main idea to be. We can refer to this as The Statement of the Main Idea. This statement should be a lean sentence or two. The process of composing this statement starts with asking questions about the text. Not all questions will apply to every text, but they will provide a good starting point for extracting the main idea from any piece of writing. ● Who - Can the student identify the person or people the text is about? ● What - Can the student identify the topic or underlying theme of the text? ● When - Can the student identify a reference to a specific time or period? ● Where - Can the student identify a specific place or a setting? ● Why - Can the student identify a reason or explanation for what happens in the text? ● How - Can the student identify a method or theory in the text? These questions, and variations of these questions, can help students draw out what the text is about. The two most important questions of those above are who and what. These will be sufficient to elicit the information required to identify the main idea in most circumstances. But, the true litmus test of whether the student has been able to absorb the text's main idea is whether or not they are able to summarize what they have read in their own words. We know through our experience in the classroom that learning-through-teaching is an extremely effective instructional strategy. It also offers teachers opportunities to observe and assess their students' grasp of the concepts they have been working on. Similarly, when we ask our students to summarize or paraphrase the main idea of an extract, we are creating an opportunity to observe their comprehension of what they have read and their ability to identify the main idea therein. You can also encourage students to regularly practice these skills by challenging them to paraphrase and summarize things you have said or read to them in class, even during lessons entirely unrelated to literacy. Encourage them to be concise and to the point; you may even wish to set a word limit of 10 or 15 words within which they must express the main idea. Keep it lean! STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN IDENTIFYING THE MAIN IDEA Get The Gist In this method, give each of your students a copy of a nonfiction paragraph. If you wish, you can differentiate for students' different abilities by choosing extracts of varying complexities. Regardless of the level of difficulty, the approach will remain the same. Have students: 1. Ask themselves who or what the paragraph is about. 2. Ask themselves what is the most important information about the who or what. 3. Restate the main idea in 10 words or less. You can model this strategy for your students by walking them through the process first. Project the text onto the whiteboard for shared reading and, with focused support and prompting, have them answer the initial questions. Part 3 of the process above can be undertaken as a piece of shared writing which will model the correct approach, before students begin to do it independently. Later, when students have written independent statements of the main idea, they can compare their responses and offer each other feedback. After feedback sessions, they can be given a further opportunity to redraft and modify their statements for accuracy and brevity. Through these processes, students will improve their ability to identify the main idea and express it in a clear and concise manner. Get the Gist - Longer Texts As we mentioned earlier, it isn't always easy to reduce a longer extract, such as a chapter, down to a single central idea - much less a whole book! There will be times, however, where students will be asked to do just that. They will need a systematic approach to help them in such circumstances. The following process provides for an effective approach: 1. Look at the title - Often the title provides a good indication of the topic of the text or at least helps to orientate the reader in the direction of the main idea. 2. Look at the first and last sentences/paragraphs of the extract - Often the main idea will be introduced and summarized respectively in these parts of the text. 3. Look for repeated words and phrases in the extract. The frequency with which they occur will be a strong indicator of their relative importance and will point students in the direction of that elusive main idea. 4. Instruct students to ask themselves, "What does the writer want me to know?" - Answering this question successfully will require the students to uncover the main idea of the text. As the students work through each of the above steps they can highlight, underline, or circle the keywords and phrases and then use these to help them form their statement of the main idea. HOW TO LOCATE THE MAIN IDEA WHEN IT IS IMPLIED Inferring the main idea requires the student to look for patterns in the details as they read. As when the main idea is explicit, the student must first identify what the topic of the writing is before determining what it is the writer wants the reader to know about that topic. If the main idea is not stated explicitly in a sentence or paragraph, then it is implied and students must consciously work to uncover it by analysing the details to infer the main idea. Conscious practice of this strategy will soon see it become second nature and the student will quickly become skilled in identifying the main idea even when it is not stated explicitly. Conclusion To efficiently identify the main idea in a piece of writing, students should first determine what the topic of the text is. Then, they will need to work out what it is the writer wants us to understand about that topic. This is the essence of how to identify the main idea. Students should understand that the main idea may not always be explicit and they may need to work hard to uncover exactly what the text implies. Regardless of whether the main idea is explicit or implicit, every paragraph will have a main idea and students should understand that it can be located at the beginning, in the middle, at the end, or even be split up throughout the paragraph. With perseverance and hard-earned experience, students will be able to use a variety of methods and, at times, a fusion of these methods, to uncover the main idea with speed and accuracy. Soon they will be able to apply these methods to a broad range of texts over a wide range of lengths and complexities. MAIN IDEA GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (FREE DOWNLOAD) VIDEO TUTORIAL ON TEACHING THE MAIN IDEA Content for this page has been written by Shane Mac Donnchaídh. A former principal of an international school and university English lecturer with 15 years of teaching and administration experience. Shane's latest Book the Complete Guide to Nonfiction Writing can be found here. Editing and support for this article have been provided by the literacyideas team.

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