

Reading Strategy 1: Finding topics, main ideas, and details in paragraphs

Paragraph: A group of sentences organized around a topic, a main idea about the topic, and details that support the main idea.

Topic: The overall SUBJECT of a paragraph (should be a noun or noun phrase)

Main idea: A STATEMENT about the topic that conveys the overriding theme of most—if not all—of the remaining sentences in a paragraph. The main idea provides the message of a given paragraph or the argument that is being made about the topic. It may be implied or directly stated, but you *must* state it in a complete sentence.

Details: specific INFORMATION about or SUPPORT for the main idea.

How to find the topic

Ask yourself the question:

What (who) is this paragraph or essay about?

How to find the main idea

Whether stated or unstated, the main idea answers (in sentence form) the following question:

What is the overall message or argument being made regarding the topic of this paragraph or essay?

Certain words or word combinations often introduce the main idea:

in short	in brief	in summary
in fact	clearly	thus
as these examples show		

Main ideas are often found in the first or last sentence of a paragraph, BUT they can also be found in between. Sometimes main ideas are expressed in two sentences, and sometimes a single main idea will serve for two paragraphs. Finally, main ideas can be unstated, or implied, requiring that you *infer* the main idea (construct a main idea on the basis of the information given).

How to find supporting details

Certain words or word combinations often introduce major and minor details:

for example	for instance
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Topics, main ideas, and supporting details WORK TOGETHER; the main idea makes an argument about the topic, the details offer support for the main idea.