

READING & LISTENING FOR MAIN IDEAS

MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS: THE TOPIC SENTENCE

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Once students can categorize individual words or items, the next step is recognizing and formulating the main ideas in a single paragraph. This is a basic skill needed to read for meaning. Paragraphs tend to begin with a topic sentence that states the paragraph's main idea. The rest of the paragraph conveys details that support this main idea. Students should be encouraged to search for the topic sentence as they read. They should also be encouraged to use topic sentences when writing their own paragraphs.

Sometimes the topic sentence is not the first sentence in the paragraph. It may be in the middle or at the end of a paragraph. Sometimes the main idea is not even stated; rather, it must be inferred by reading the detail sentences.

When he is reading, ask your child to underline or highlight the main idea if it is stated in a topic sentence. If the main idea must be inferred, ask your child to write it in his own words in the margin or on a piece of paper. This strategy will eventually enable your child to highlight and take margin notes in textbooks.

Lecture material can also be grouped into main ideas. Some teachers list main ideas before presenting to the class, which helps students chunk the information into smaller, more manageable units. Other teachers present detailed information without main idea cues. In this case, students need to infer the main ideas, which can be more difficult. If your child has difficulty determining main ideas, you should consider asking the teacher to supply a list of main ideas before a lecture. By reviewing the list with your child ahead of time, he will be better able to follow the lecture.

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