

READING & LISTENING FOR MAIN IDEAS

MAIN IDEAS IN MULTI-PARAGRAPH MATERIAL: A HIERARCHY

Joan Sedita, M.Ed.*

Many reading assignments, such as textbook chapters, contain a hierarchy of main ideas and sub-main ideas. For example, a chapter title is the chapter's overall main idea. Chapter sections, usually marked by bold-faced section headings, are the sub-main ideas. Finally, each paragraph within a section has a main idea.

Before reading a chapter, have your child note the main idea and sub-main ideas by writing down the chapter title and bold-faced section headings from the chapter. This breaks the reading assignment into manageable units. Your child can then read each paragraph within a section and note its main idea. "Micro-uniting" a longer reading assignment in this way creates smaller, more manageable units and helps with comprehension.

Also, knowing the main ideas before a lesson or lengthy reading assignment gives students a "hook" to hang the details. It enables them to anticipate what they will be hearing or reading. You can ask your child's teacher for a list of the main ideas he or she will be covering in advance, or you can sometimes pull them out of the textbook using the headings.

One way for your child to practice identifying main ideas is to create titles for articles in the newspaper. Most papers have sections with one-paragraph stories. Often, they are abbreviated international or national news items. Clip out the story without its title and have your child read it. Then have your child pretend he is the news reporter who must write title that conveys the main idea. This is a good way for your child to learn current events while practicing an important study skill.

* Joan Sedita, M.Ed. is the founder and director of Sedita Learning Strategies (<http://www.seditalearning.com>). Ms. Sedita is an experienced educator, nationally recognized speaker and teacher trainer, and author. She has worked for 30 years in the field of education, and has presented to thousands of educators, parents, and related professionals at schools, colleges, clinics, and professional organizations throughout the United States.