

Reading Comprehension

Techniques to help Understand Reading Assignments

Skim and Scan

Before reading through in detail, preview the text by skim reading the entire passage and noting visual clues, such as bold headings, italicized words or phrases, and visual aids.

Skim to find:

- general theme of the section
- main ideas
- the type of text and the organization
- the author's purpose (to inform, persuade, describe, explain, etc.)
- general contents of the section

Scan for detail:

- make notes in the margin
- write down the topic of each paragraph
- underline or highlight important sentences or phrases

Look for and mark:

- Topic Sentence of a paragraph establishes the content. The point made in this sentence is developed and supported by the rest of the paragraph.
- Author's Opinion can be found in certain words and phrases that show bias or emotion, or approval
- Key Words help determine the author's purpose
- Style Features, such as different fonts, bold, italics, and underlining can help determine meaning.

Useful Concepts

Main idea of a paragraph is what the paragraph is about. Each sentence in a paragraph will support and develop the main idea. The main idea can be directly stated or implied. Directly stated main ideas can mostly be found in the first sentence, but can vary depending on the content. If the main idea is implied, it can be drawn from the supporting details of the paragraph. Ask yourself:

- What point does this sentence make?
- Is it the one subject the author talks about the most?
- Do all supporting details of the paragraph support this idea?
- If you turned the topic sentence into a question, do the details answer the question?

Common Errors When Finding the Main Idea:

- Do not select a statement that is too specific. A statement that is too specific cannot serve as the central idea because it does not cover all the supporting detail.
- Do not select a statement that is too general. The main idea must be supported by the rest of the paragraph, so a broad sentence will not be the main idea. It may state a general concept or be used as a hook to engage the reader, but it goes beyond unifying the supporting details. In order for a general statement to be true, additional supporting details would be needed to develop the main idea.