

Reading Review

Finding the Stated or Implied Main Idea

In order to find the main idea of a passage, first determine the subject or topic of the passage. To do this, simply ask yourself “What is this passage about?” Usually your answer to this question will be the subject that is most often mentioned or referred to in the passage. Once you have determined the topic, then ask yourself “What point is being made about that topic?” to get the main idea. For example, your answer to the question “What is this passage about?” might be “crickets” (note that this is a general answer, but more focused than “insects”). Then, your answer to the second question might be “In China, crickets are highly valued” (note that this answer contains a general point about crickets which more specific details in the passage, such as “Crickets are considered to be a symbol of good luck” and “Some Chinese families even have crickets as pets,” might support).

Sometimes the main idea may be stated in a sentence, which may appear anywhere in the passage. At other times, the main idea is not stated in a sentence, but is implied through the details and examples in the passage. In either case, asking yourself “What is this passage about?” and “What point is being made about that topic?” can help you focus on the main idea.

Questions asking you to determine the main idea may be worded in some of the following ways:

1. The main idea of the passage is
2. The author’s main point is
3. The central or controlling idea is
4. The author implies
5. The passage suggests
6. The main point of the selection is

Let’s try an example:

In the coastal region of the state of North Carolina, the waves of the Atlantic Ocean lap the shoreline from the border with Virginia to those of South Carolina. With forts, museums, and lighthouses prominent to the area, there is much to see and do. Many people revisit the Outer Banks year after year, taking time to check out the activities at Jockey’s Ridge, Kitty Hawk, and the drama, The Lost Colony. Youngsters of all ages enjoy the ferry rides that are provided from island

to island. Some of the many specific areas to consider when visiting the Coastal Region of North Carolina are presented in this section.

The central idea of this passage is that

- a. **The coastal region of North Carolina has many forts, sounds, museums, and lighthouses.** This is stated in the passage, but the passage has many more examples, so this doesn't cover what the entire passage is about.
- b. **The coastal region of North Carolina offers much for visitors to see and do.** This covers the examples in the entire passage and is the correct answer.
- c. **The coastal region of North Carolina is the state's most popular vacation spot.** Positive things are mentioned about the area, but there is not enough information to support that it is the state's most popular vacation spot.
- d. **The coastal region of North Carolina is on the Atlantic Ocean.** We can tell that this is true according to the passage, but the passage is about much more than this one fact, so this doesn't cover what the entire passage is about.

Determining Sentence Relationships

Being able to see the relationships between sentences in a passage is an important part of being able to comprehend the passage. Often writers will put in transitional words or phrases to indicate a relationship. For example, a writer might use the phrase "in contrast" or the word "however" to indicate a contrast or a different idea, or "for example" to indicate that an illustration or an example is coming next. Sometimes, however, authors do not provide such clues, but it is still important to see the relationship. One trick is to mentally insert a transitional word or phrase between the sentences to see if that makes sense. And, on a test, if you are simply given two sentences, try to imagine them within the context of a paragraph before trying to insert a word or phrase. Ask yourself, "What would this passage be about?" and "What point does the author seem to be trying to make?" Below are some of the most common types of relationships and some of the transitional words that serve to indicate them:

Example (indicates that the author is providing an example): for example, for instance, to illustrate

Additional information (indicates that the author is adding information to the idea just discussed): and, too, also, additionally, moreover

Contrast (indicates differences between two things, people, or ideas): but, however, yet, on the other hand, whereas

Comparison (Indicates similarities between two things, people, or ideas): similarly, like, the same as, just as, in a like manner

Cause and effect (indicates a cause and a result): because, for this reason, since, as a result, consequently, so

Time order (indicates when something happened in relation to something else): first, second, next, then, finally, before, after

When you are being asked to determine the relationships between two sentences, you will see two sentences and be asked to determine the relationship between them. Questions may be worded in the following ways:

1. What is the relationship between the two sentences?
2. How are the two sentences related?
3. What is the relationship of the first sentence to the second sentence?
4. What is the relationship of the second sentence to the first sentence?

Let's try an example:

Grammar skills are emphasized because they are helpful outside of the classroom.

Secretaries must be able to proofread and check all letters that go out of an office.

- a. **The second sentence provides an example to support what is stated in the first sentence.** If business managers must write coherent and easy-to-read memos, then this is an example of how grammar skills can be useful outside of a classroom setting. Also, the phrase “for example” makes sense placed between the two sentences. This is the correct answer.
- b. **The second sentence gives an effect of the cause stated in the first sentence.** The first sentence does not state a cause of anything and a phrase signaling an effect, such as “as a result” does not really make sense between the two sentences.
- c. **The second sentence provides an idea that contrasts with the idea stated in the first sentence.** The second sentence indicates that grammar skills must be useful to business managers, so the idea is not in contrast to the idea of the first sentence. A contrast word, like however, does not fit between the two sentences.
- d. **The second sentence gives a cause for the effect stated in the first sentence.** The fact that business managers must write coherent memos is not a cause for grammar skills being useful outside of the classroom, it merely supports the fact that they are. Also, a word indicating a causal relationship, such as “because” does not fit between the two sentences.

Finding Inferences and Drawing Conclusions

An inference is a conclusion that is not directly stated by the author, but one that the reader may draw based on information given in the passage. This information consists of supporting details. Supporting details are specific pieces of information that combine to clarify, support, or develop a main idea or point, whether that main idea is stated in a topic sentence or is implied. When there is no topic sentence, we must infer, or state in our own words what this idea is. We sometimes call this “reading between the lines”. When we make inferences, we may be inferring the main idea of the passage as a whole, or an important point from the passage that is shown through details. Especially in literature such as novels, short stories, and poems, an author may *show* with details and word choice rather than just telling the information.

In order to make an inference you must use:

1. Clues provided by the author’s choice of details and words.
2. Your own background knowledge and personal experience *as they apply to the clues*.
3. Common sense and logic.

Questions asking you to make an inference may be worded in some of the following ways:

1. This passage suggests
2. You can infer from this passage that
3. The author implies that
4. The writer of the passage probably feels, thinks, agrees, etc.
5. Or you may simply be asked to draw a general conclusion based on details in the passage.

*Remember that a conclusion is a general statement that you infer about the passage as a whole based on details in the passage, and inferences may be about any point in the passage.

Let’s try an example:

If you get a cat to come to the sound of a can-opener because the cat anticipates a bite of tuna, you are on your way. You then begin to call the cat by name at the same time. Over time you discontinue the can-opener sound and just call the cat while still rewarding with a bite of tuna. Eventually, you discontinue the tuna. However, it is suggested that you provide periodic treats to reinforce the behavior. After all, cats sometimes become impatient with people who aren’t with “their” plan of how life should be.

We may conclude from this passage that

- a. **Dogs would never respond to a bite of tuna.** There is no information in the passage about dogs, so this conclusion would be too big of a “leap” from the information presented. Also, those who have dogs know that they enjoy fish, too.
- b. **Cats can be trained to behave in a mannerly fashion.** This is too general a conclusion to draw from the example given. We cannot tell from the passage whether or not this type of obedience would extend to other behaviors.
- c. **Cats can be trained to come when called.** The example described involves calling the cat’s name and the cat coming to the caller. This is the correct answer.
- d. **Cats will only come if you have food with which to reward them.** We cannot conclude this because the passage also suggests discontinuing the can opener sound and the tuna.

Determining the Author’s Tone

The tone of a passage reflects the author’s attitude toward or beliefs about the subject. The tone of a passage can be positive or negative, and it can also be neutral, as when the author is simply presenting information. Tone is reflected in the information the author wishes to include, the points he or she chooses to emphasize, and in the words he or she chooses. Keep in mind that you are being asked about the author’s attitude toward the subject, not yours.

Let’s try an example:

Anyone who goes into the teaching profession today is either crazy or a saint. Teachers today not only have to see to it that their students learn academic material, but they must keep current with new ideas within their profession and deal with tons of administrative paperwork on top of grading papers. They also must often counsel students and guide their decisions. And their salaries are usually not much above the poverty level. If our society values the education of our young people, teachers should be given more respect and rewards for their efforts.

The author’s tone is

- a. **admiring.** Clearly, the author admires teachers, but the focus of the passage is that teachers are not rewarded enough for what they do.
- b. **begudging.** The author is not speaking about his or her own life, so therefore cannot be “holding a grudge” against anyone.
- c. **neutral.** The author clearly is including his or her opinions and feelings, so he or she is not just presenting information the way a textbook would.

- d. **indignant.** Indignant means angry or upset, and clearly the author is upset that teachers are not rewarded more, expressed particularly in the phrase "...either crazy or a saint" and in the phrase "...not much above the poverty level". This is the correct answer.

The author would disagree with which of the following statements?

- a. **Teachers make enough money.** Yes, the author would disagree with this statement. Salary is even mentioned in the passage. This is the correct answer.
- b. **Teachers' jobs are very difficult.** The author would agree with this statement. What they have to do is mentioned.
- c. **Society takes teachers for granted.** The author would agree with this statement. Being more appreciative of teachers is mentioned.
- d. **Teachers need a raise.** The author would agree with this statement. Salary is mentioned as being low.

Reading Practice Test

1. Did you know that the surface of water is elastic? When you venture deep into the Amazon Jungle, you may encounter a lizard-like creature that runs across the top of the water. He does not swim the water; he runs it, like it is a solid surface. It is amazing to see! The combination of his light weight, the speed at which he runs, and the surface of the water giving slightly he maintains his precarious balance on top of the water.

Identify the statement below that gives the most accurate statement of the central idea of this passage.

- a. Lizards in the Amazon Jungle are different from those in America.
 - b. Elasticity of the water's surface is one component of the lizard's ability to run on water.
 - c. All lizards are able to run on water, if it has elasticity.
 - d. Water in the Amazon Jungle has elasticity because of the hot climate.
2. Bob wondered what career he should choose. He equated making lots of money with success, yet he wanted to be happy in his work and feel that he was contributing something to society. What was his vocation? He considered being a physical therapist, but then thought the life of a psychologist might be interesting. Could he be a mortician? Maybe he would be a microbiologist and find a cure for a terrible disease. He knew one thing: he did not want a clerical job in which he would be taking dictation or preparing transcripts of information. Perhaps he would be a truck driver and transport products for companies across

the country. Which one was the most credible as a career for him? These thoughts prompted Bob to make a list of his interests and abilities.

The main idea of this passage is

- a. Bob is having a mid-life crisis.
- b. Making a list of your interests and abilities is a good way to choose a career.
- c. There are many career options open to everyone today.
- d. Bob wants to make money, but he also wants to feel satisfied in his work and help his fellow man.

3. Certain aspects must be in place to have a successful basketball team. Talented players are a must. Those athletes with agility, poise, endurance, and strength are integral. Good coaching is necessary to bring the team together with common purpose. Certain discipline is required for the team to function as a well-oiled machine.

Offense is an integral part of the game. Shots going in the basket are what scores points and the team with the most of those wins! Three point perimeter shooters can win a game in a clutch last-second play when you're down by two. However, those players who create and recognize openings are critical to building the score with higher percentage shots near the rim. Reliable free-throw shooters can make the difference down the stretch and can be the difference in maintaining a lead or losing it in the end.

A good coach will recruit a variety of players adept in the various types of offensive maneuvers. He will then create and teach plays that allow for fluid movement of the offense to create open shots on the basket. Having a well-executed play that results in points on the scoreboard is both beautiful and critical.

Defense is often the key to winning. By denying your opponent the very things you seek on offense, you can secure a win. Good defensive players are those who anticipate passes by being ready to spring into a passing lane at a moment's notice and steal the ball. This often results in a quick two points on the other end of the court. Good defenders also stick with their opponent on defense. The job is to guard your man totally. That means he doesn't get the ball and if he does, he does not get an open shot. In zone defenses, you will do the same for any player who comes into your area. A good coach will establish defenses based on the opponent's offensive preference and will switch defenses throughout a game to find the one that works best.

The main idea of this passage is that

- a. With sound offense and defense, and the heart of a winner, a basketball team can emerge victorious.
- b. Basketball is a complicated game to watch.
- c. Good coaching is a critical element in developing a good basketball team.
- d. Good basketball playing takes practice and determination .

4. The people of colonial America would be horrified at what is considered to be acceptable language on TV today.

Many older people today are against when they hear the words to some rap music songs.

How are these two sentences related?

- a. The second sentence provides an example of what is stated in the first.
 - b. The second sentence provides a comparison with the idea stated in the first.
 - c. The first sentence states a cause and the second sentence states an effect.
 - d. The second sentence provides a solution to the problem stated in the first.
5. Aerobic exercises done vigorously for 15 or more minutes at a time increase the heart rate.

A carefully followed aerobic exercise program can strengthen the heart .

What is the relationship of the second sentence to the first?

- a. The second sentence explains the first.
 - b. The second sentence contradicts the first.
 - c. The second sentence states an effect or outcome.
 - d. The second sentence states a cause.
6. Today, people who type their papers using a word processing program on a computer scoff at those who still use typewriters.

A word processing program allows the typist to make corrections and save them, whereas one must re-type a whole page to correct a mistake if using a typewriter.

What is the relationship of the second sentence to the first?

- a. The second sentence provides a contrast to the first sentence.
 - b. The second sentence provides a comparison to the first sentence.
 - c. The second sentence states a cause of the effect found in the first sentence.
 - d. The second sentence provides more information on the idea of the first sentence.
7. At one time, one could only trace one's family ancestry by writing letters, visiting courthouses, and begging relatives for any crumb of information. However, today with the World Wide Web, the task has become much simpler. Much of the archived history of our lives and our ancestors' lives is readily available on-line. In addition, there are specific software programs in existence that will walk you through the process of creating a family tree and take you to appropriate Internet sites for record information. Another alternative is hiring

someone or some company to do your tree for you. Depending on your dedication and time, a method is available for you.

You might think about tracing your family roots. It is fun for many and will let you in on your family's past. Even if you find a skeleton in the closet, maybe you could just ignore that twig of your family tree.

We may infer from the passage that

- a. When we trace our family's history, we may find bad as well as good things.
 - b. Tracing our family tree is not worth the effort.
 - c. The records we must search in order to come up with a family tree have changed due to the World Wide Web.
 - d. Tracing one's family tree is worthwhile for everyone.
8. He was not an immoral or an illogical man, yet in these postwar times he wanted to follow his dreams and do all of the crazy things that he had always wanted to do. The interpersonal relationships he had formed during the war had faded as his friends had dispersed, and now he was completely autonomous. He had a universal goal that bound all of his dreams together and could not be submerged: to enjoy himself. Would he be misguided if he pursued his dream to circumnavigate the world in his boat? Other people might consider his abnormal for doing this, but he didn't care. Would he ever return to the ordered, predictable life he had before as a financial advisor? Although his position was hardly defensible, for now he was committed to his dream of independence.

The man described in the passage most probably

- a. wants to change jobs.
 - b. should not pursue his dream because it would involve abandoning his family.
 - c. misses his wartime buddies.
 - d. finds himself with a new freedom after serving in the armed forces and wants to make the most of the opportunity.
9. The name of Transylvania County in North Carolina might first conjure up thoughts of Dracula and bloodthirsty vampires. Some may even think it is a fictional place. It is, however, a real county in the western mountains of our beautiful state. The county is filled with winding roads, quaint little towns, and best of all. . . many, many, waterfalls.
- The county has numerous rivers, streams intertwined within the valleys, hills, gorges, and mountains in the area. If you take a trip through the county, you'll use your brakes a lot, as you will round many curves and go down many hills. Your gas pedal will be used as well, as you have to give your ride extra push power to climb the steep hills on your journey. The rewards are worth it. You'll round a bend in the road, look to your left or right, and a beautiful waterfall

with clear, white-blue water will be crashing down the side of a rocky mountain face, and landing with a bubbly, frothy splash in the stream below. There you will be tempted to pull over and watch as the water begins its continued journey down the river stream climbing and playing among boulders as massive as the vehicle you just left parked along the roadway. You'll be tempted to climb the rocks to play in the water and even to perhaps go with the water.

Just then you'll likely remember your vehicle, and where you are. You'll hike back, load up, and go around the next curve and up the next hill, where you'll again be blessed with a view of water doing a new dance in a new way in another of the magical waterfalls of Transylvania County. In this county, there is no Dracula, although there may be a few mountain bats. But mostly there is beauty, lots and lots of beauty.

From this passage, we may conclude that

- a. The novel Dracula by Bram Stoker takes place in Transylvania County, North Carolina.
 - b. There is no such thing as a Vampire Bat.
 - c. Transylvania County is a fine place to go for a quiet mountain vacation.
 - d. Transylvania County has a lot of history.
10. People today make life too difficult for smokers. Smokers today are segregated from nonsmokers in the workplace, school, and restaurants, among other places. Both of my parents have smoked for all of their adult lives and neither one has had lung or heart problems because of it. A little secondhand smoke is, at best, just an inconvenience for nonsmokers, not a life-threatening assault on their health.

The author's tone is_____.

- a. persuasive
- b. defensive
- c. neutral
- d. critical

The author would agree that:_____

- a. smoking should be a personal choice
 - b. nonsmokers should be segregated
 - c. smoking killed his father
 - d. young children should be allowed to smoke if they want to
11. Stricter gun control laws won't help our crime rates. Just like when Prohibition laws were enacted and people began to make whiskey illegally, people will find a way to purchase guns if they want to and create a field day for the black market. Also, some people want to use guns honestly, for self - protection or for legal

hunting purposes. Let's find another way to deal with crime without penalizing those who have good reasons for purchasing and keeping guns.

The author's tone is_____

- a. admiring
- b. begrudging
- c. neutral
- d. persuasive

The author would agree with which of the following statements?

- a. America needs more gun owners.
- b. Guns don't cause violence.
- c. We should revoke some gun control laws.
- d. We need more gun control laws.

12. Young people today have it much easier than we did, and yet they still complain that life is too hard. Teenagers, especially, don't want to lift a finger to help around the house, but still expect their parents to buy them luxuries like cars and CD players. When I was young, I was thankful just to have indoor plumbing and electricity, and I was expected to do my share of chores.

The author's tone is_____.

- a. admiring
- b. contemptuous
- c. neutral
- d. persuasive

The author would agree that:_____.

- a. indoor plumbing is a bad idea.
- b. parents shouldn't ask too much of their children.
- c. teenagers aren't capable of hard work.
- d. parents should ask more of their children.

ANSWERS KEY TO THE READING PRACTICE TEST

Finding the Stated or Implied Main Idea

1. b
2. d
3. a

Determining Sentence Relationships

4. b
5. c
6. c

Finding Inferences and Drawing Conclusions

7. a
8. d
9. c

Determining the Author's Tone

10. b, a
11. d, c
12. b, d