

MAIN IDEAS

- The main idea is the central, or most important, idea in a paragraph or passage. It states the purpose and sets the direction of the paragraph or passage.
- The main idea may be stated or it may be implied.
- When the main idea of a paragraph is stated, it is most often found in the first sentence of the paragraph. However, the main idea may be found in any sentence of the paragraph.
- The main idea may be stated in the first sentence of a paragraph and then be repeated or restated at the end of the paragraph.
- The main idea may be split. The first sentence of a paragraph may present a point of view, while the last sentence presents a contrasting or opposite view.
- To find the main idea of any paragraph or passage, ask these questions:
 1. Who or what is the paragraph about?
 2. What aspect or idea about the ‘who’ or ‘what’ is the author concerned with?

Main Idea Practice Paragraphs 1-6

Read and think about the following sample paragraphs, in which the main idea sentences are underlined.

➤ Paragraph One

It is often said that lightning never strikes twice in the same place, but this isn't true.
Go ask the forest rangers. Rangers who spend their summers as fire-fighters will tell you that every thundershower brings several bolts of lightning to their lookout stations.

(Notice that the first sentence tells what the paragraph is about; the sentences that follow support the idea stated in the first sentence.)

Paragraph Two

Costs were low that year and the output high. There was a good person for each job and the market remained firm. There were no losses from fire. All in all it was the best years in the history of the company.

(Note that the first three sentences give details to explain why it was the best year in the company's history.)

Paragraph Three

There are great numbers of deer around here. This whole area is great country for hunters and fishermen. There are bears, mountain lions, and coyotes. To the east there are streams full of trout, and there are ducks and geese.

(The author begins and ends with examples. The main idea is stated in the second sentence.)

➤ Paragraph Four

Advertising affects our lives everyday. Brand names are common household words. We start each day using the toothpaste, soap, and breakfast foods promoted by advertisers. Ads have made the cars we drive signs of our success. Our choices of food, dress, and entertainment are swayed by ads. Not one aspect of American life is untouched by advertising.

(The main idea is stated at the beginning of the paragraph and then restated at the end.)

➤ Paragraph Five

Penicillin is one of the greatest of the wonder drugs. It has saved thousands of lives already and will save many more in the future. Unfortunately it has no effect at all on most of the ills of mankind. Penicillin is a very good drug, but it is certainly not a cure-all.

(The author has split the main idea. This paragraph begins with positive comments on penicillin. The word but signals a shift in thought, and the paragraph ends with a statement of its limitations.)

➤ Paragraph Six

Do you wear glasses? Make sure your glasses fit well. The earpieces should be at eye level. Don't try to adjust the earpieces yourself. Take your glasses for adjustments to the place you bought them. Keep your glasses in a case when you're not wearing them. This will prevent scratches. Keep the lenses clean. A soft cloth is best for cleaning.

(The main idea is implied. All of the sentences in the paragraph give details about a main idea. In this paragraph the implied main idea is that taking care of your glasses involves many steps.)

Read the passage.

To Stand or Not to Stand?

In 2016, Vallecito Elementary School in San Rafael, California, became the first U.S. school to replace all of its ordinary desks with raised desks that students stand at. Speaking to a reporter from *TIME for Kids* magazine, one student at the school gave the standing desks high praise. "You feel happier, you're less tired, and you're more active," she said. According to several studies, children working at standing desks burn more calories and are more focused on tasks. However, some teachers and parents are opposed to the change. They are concerned that standing for long periods of time could cause fatigue, strain on the legs and feet, or posture problems. In addition, standing desks are more expensive than seated desks. Only time will tell whether standing desks will prove to be the next big trend or a failed experiment.

What is the main idea of the passage?

Some people say that standing desks promote good study habits, but others are wary about the new desks.

Studies have shown that standing desks help students focus on their schoolwork while being more active.

A **main idea** is the most important idea or claim that a text communicates. The details in a text support, prove, or illustrate the main idea.

The main idea of the passage is:

Some people say that standing desks promote good study habits, but others are wary about the new desks.

Some details are about the benefits of standing desks. Other details are about possible drawbacks. This suggests that the main idea is the pros and cons of standing desks. The title also suggests this.