



## The Betty East Tutoring Center at Victoria College

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### Reading Comprehension Techniques

Use these methods if you find that you struggle to retain information that you read or feel overwhelmed by the amount you have to read.

#### Skim and Scan

Before reading through the entire section in detail, preview the text quickly by skim reading the entire passage without stopping to study detail or reread anything you misunderstood.

##### Skimming:

By skimming, you should be able to gather:

- the general theme of the section
- whom the author is trying to talk to
- the type of text (report, article, formal or informal letter, etc.)
- the author's purpose (to inform, persuade, describe, explain, etc.)
- general contents of the section

Now that you have a general understanding of the section, you may need to scan back over the selection and pay attention to detail. When scanning, make notes in the margin, writing down the topic of each paragraph and underlining or highlighting important sentences or phrases.

#### What to Consider

When trying to comprehend meaning, remember TACKLES: topic sentence, author's opinion, central theme, key words, layout, explanations, style.

##### Topic Sentence:

The topic sentence of a paragraph can be identified as the sentence that establishes the content of the paragraph. The point made in this sentence is developed and supported by the rest of the paragraph. Picking out the topic sentence of paragraphs helps you understand the main idea of the section.

##### Author's Opinion:

An author often shows opinion by adding certain phrases to their writing or adding value to words. Using this, the reader can assume what position the author takes in the writing. For example, an author can:

- add words such as *fortunately* or *unfortunately* to a phrase to show that they are pleased or displeased with what they are discussing
- show emotion by using words such as *surprisingly*, *desirable*, etc.
- show that they are impressed by adding words such as *huge* or *enormous* to a phrase

The ability to realize whether an author states an opinion or remains neutral on a subject will help you identify the tone of the writing and the author's purpose.

##### Key Words:

To determine the meaning of a word you don't know:

- determine the part of speech (verb, adverb, adjective, noun)
- determine the function by identifying how it relates to other words in the sentence
- identify what the context reveals about the word

By looking for clues and indications, you may be able to decide the correct meaning of the word. If not, look up the word in the glossary of your textbook or a dictionary.

### Layout Features:

These clues are:

Title: identifies what the text is primarily about

Heading: a title printed at the top of a page that shows what is going to be discussed in that section.

Subheading: provides a brief summary or explanation

Paragraph division: Each paragraph deals with a single idea that develops the subject of the entire piece.

Paragraphs are linked together with linking words or phrases that divide the piece in a logical way.

### Style Features:

Using different fonts, along with bold, italic, and underlined words, can emphasize key words or phrases that are vital to understanding the meaning of the writing.

## **Useful Concepts**

### Main idea:

The main idea of a paragraph or piece is what the paragraph is mostly 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 be found in the first sentence, the last sentence, the middle, or even in two sentences in a paragraph. If the main idea is implied it can be drawn from the supporting details of the paragraph. Ask yourself:

What point has the author made?

What is the one subject the author talks about the most?

Do all supporting details of the paragraph support a central idea? What is that 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. Additionally, a statement that is too general 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.