What Is the Main Idea?

What’s the point?” You’ve probably heard these words before. It’s a question people ask when they want to know the main idea that someone is trying to express. The same question can guide you as you read. Recognizing the main idea, or point, is the most important key to good comprehension. Sometimes a main idea is immediately clear, as in the above cartoon. The point—that the man on the couch has problems—is well supported by the statements about his job, wife, friends, and dog.

To find the main idea of a reading selection, ask yourself, “What’s the point the author is trying to make?” For instance, read the paragraph on the following page, asking yourself as you do, “What is the author’s point?”
Many people feel that violence on television is harmless entertainment. However, we now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways. One study showed that frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others. They try to protect themselves from the outside world with extra locks on the doors, alarm systems, guard dogs, and guns. In addition, that same study showed that heavy TV watchers are less upset about real-life violence than non-TV watchers. It seems that the constant violence they see on TV makes them less sensitive to the real thing. Another study, of a group of children, found that TV violence increases aggressive behavior. Children who watched violent shows were more willing to hurt another child in games where they were given a choice between helping and hurting. They were also more likely to select toy weapons over other kinds of playthings.

A good way to find an author’s point, or main idea, is to look for a general statement. Then decide if that statement is supported by most of the other material in the paragraph. If it is, you have found the main idea.

Below are four statements from the passage. Pick out the general statement that is supported by the other material in the passage. Write the letter of that statement in the space provided. Then read the explanation that follows.

Four statements from the passage:

A. Many people feel that violence on television is harmless entertainment.
B. However, we now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways.
C. One study showed that frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others.
D. They try to protect themselves from the outside world with extra locks on the doors, alarm systems, guard dogs, and guns.

The general statement that expresses the main idea of the passage is _____.

Explanation

Sentence A: The paragraph does not support the idea that TV violence is harmless, so sentence A cannot be the main idea. However, it does introduce the topic of the paragraph: TV violence.

Sentence B: The statement “TV violence does affect people in negative ways” is a general one. And the rest of the passage goes on to describe three negative ways that TV violence affects people. Sentence B, then, is the sentence that expresses the main idea of the passage.

Sentence C: This sentence is about only one study. It is not general enough to include the other studies that are also cited in the paragraph. It is the first supporting idea for the main idea.
Sentence D: This sentence provides detailed evidence for the first supporting idea, which is that frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others. It does not cover the other material in the paragraph.

The Main Idea as an “Umbrella” Idea

Think of the main idea as an “umbrella” idea. The main idea is the author’s general point; all the other material of the paragraph fits under it. That other material is made up of supporting details—specific evidence such as examples, causes, reasons, or facts. The diagram below shows the relationship.

The explanations and activities on the following pages will deepen your understanding of the main idea.

Recognizing a Main Idea

As you read through a passage, you must think as you read. If you merely take in words, you will come to the end of the passage without understanding much of what you have read. Reading is an active process, as opposed to watching television, which is passive. You must actively engage your mind, and, as you read, keep asking yourself, “What’s the point?” Here are three strategies that will help you find the main idea.

1. Look for general versus specific ideas.
2. Use the topic to lead you to the main idea.
3. Use key words to lead you to the main idea.

Each strategy is explained on the following pages.
1 Look for General versus Specific Ideas

You saw in the paragraph on TV violence that the main idea is a general idea supported by specific ideas. The following practices will improve your skill at separating general from specific ideas. Learning how to tell the difference between general and specific ideas will help you locate the main idea.

### PRACTICE 1

Each group of words below has one general idea and three specific ideas. The general idea includes all the specific ideas. Identify each general idea with a G and the specific ideas with an S. Look first at the example.

**Example**

_ G dishonesty  
_ S greed  
_ G bad qualities  
_ S selfishness  

*(Bad qualities is the general idea which includes three specific types of bad qualities: dishonesty, greed, and selfishness.)*

1. ___ handsome  
   ___ appearance  
   ___ well-dressed  
   ___ shabby

2. ___ seafood  
   ___ oysters  
   ___ clams  
   ___ lobster

3. ___ heavy traffic  
   ___ bus not on time  
   ___ alarm didn’t go off  
   ___ excuses for being late

4. ___ poor pay  
   ___ mean boss  
   ___ very dull work  
   ___ undesirable job

5. ___ giggling  
   ___ childish behavior  
   ___ tantrums  
   ___ playing peek-a-boo

6. ___ paper cuts  
   ___ minor problems  
   ___ broken nails  
   ___ wrong numbers

7. ___ try to be kinder  
   ___ eat healthier foods  
   ___ go to bed earlier  
   ___ resolutions

8. ___ take stairs instead of elevator  
   ___ ride bike instead of driving  
   ___ exercise opportunities  
   ___ walk instead of riding bus
9. ___ skip breakfast
   ___ grab a donut mid-morning
   ___ poor eating habits
   ___ order supersize portions

10. ___ different goals
    ___ no common interests
    ___ dislike each other’s friends
    ___ reasons for breaking up

**PRACTICE 2**

Write out the answers to each question in the spaces provided. For each question, the answers are specific details that illustrate the general idea, which is underlined.

1. There are many material things in everyday life (appliances, electronic equipment, and the like) that we come to depend upon. What are three things that you would hate to be without?

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

2. If you were suddenly wealthy, you could hire other people to do tasks that you dislike. What are three specific chores that you’d hand over to somebody else?

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

3. Most of us enjoy a good movie, but we have different ideas of what makes a film “good.” What are three specific qualities that a movie needs in order for you to really like it?

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

4. We all know people whom we find difficult. Think of a person that you find hard to get along with. Name three specific reasons you find this person difficult.

   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
PRACTICE 3

In the following groups, one statement is the general point, and the other statements are specific support for the point. Identify each point with a P and each statement of support with an S.

1. ___ The vegetables were soggy and tasteless.
   ___ The chicken was hard to chew.
   ___ The meal was very unpleasant.
   ___ The rolls were rock-hard.

2. ___ The team’s best player is averaging over 30 points a game.
   ___ The basketball team is in first place in its division.
   ___ The team has won eight of its first ten games.
   ___ The basketball team is off to a great start.

3. ___ The man doesn’t use his turn signals.
   ___ The man drives too fast down narrow residential streets.
   ___ The man is an unsafe driver.
   ___ The man doesn’t come to a complete stop at stop signs.

4. ___ Students stay in touch with friends through Facebook and e-mail.
   ___ Students write papers and share class notes online.
   ___ Students do much of their research on the Internet.
   ___ Students have practical uses for computers.
PRACTICE 4

In each of the following groups, one statement is the general point, and the other statements are specific support for the point. Identify each point with a P and each statement of support with an S.

1. ___ A. Among teenage girls, gossip contributes to bonding.
   ___ B. Political gossip often is leaked to the media as a way of learning how the public is likely to react to a particular policy.
   ___ C. Gossip takes many forms and serves various purposes.
   ___ D. In the business world, gossip can provide insights unavailable through official facts and figures.

2. ___ A. When answering the phone, some people’s first words are “Who’s this?”
   ___ B. Some people have terrible telephone manners.
   ___ C. Some people never bother to identify themselves when calling someone.
   ___ D. Some people hang up without even saying goodbye.

3. ___ A. Federal law should prohibit banks from giving credit cards to college students.
   ___ B. Credit-card debt is the leading cause of bankruptcy for young Americans.
   ___ C. Taking advantage of the fact that many parents will pay their children’s credit-card debts, banks extend excessive credit to students.
   ___ D. When they receive their monthly credit-card bills, many students can pay only the minimum required and so have hefty interest charges on large unpaid amounts.

4. ___ A. Bats are so rarely rabid that a person has a better chance of catching rabies from a cow than from a bat.
   ___ B. Bats, in spite of their bad reputation, are not a danger to human beings.
   ___ C. Bats are afraid of humans and do their best to stay away from them.
   ___ D. Unlike movie vampires, bats do not bite people unless frightened or under attack.
In each of the following groups—all based on textbook selections—one statement is the general point, and the other statements are specific support for the point. Identify each point with a P and each statement of support with an S.

1. ___ A. Companies that lose lawsuits usually pass the cost along to consumers.  
   ___ B. To protect themselves from malpractice suits, doctors now give more patients unneeded tests, which cost hundreds of millions of dollars a year.  
   ___ C. The cost of fighting a lawsuit forces some small businesses to close, even when they have successfully defended themselves.  
   ___ D. The ever-growing number of lawsuits has had a number of negative consequences.

2. ___ A. Our social roles—whether we’re students, employees, visitors, etc.—limit what emotions are acceptable for us to express.  
   ___ B. Given the widespread habit of suppressing our emotions, many of us have trouble recognizing what we’re really feeling.  
   ___ C. Most of us rarely express our deepest emotions because of a number of factors.  
   ___ D. We often hide our emotions rather than display them so as not to seem weak or needy to others.

3. ___ A. Disagreeing parties can accept the status quo, agreeing to just live with the situation as it stands.  
   ___ B. When faced with a disagreement, the parties involved have several ways to proceed.  
   ___ C. One party may use physical, social, or economic force to impose a solution on the others.  
   ___ D. Negotiation, or reaching a mutually acceptable solution, is one means of dealing with conflict.

4. ___ A. With bribes, Prohibition-era bootleggers persuaded politicians, police, and other public officials to ignore the illegal sale of alcoholic beverages.  
   ___ B. Prohibition glamorized drinking and made it fashionable for people to drink in illegal bars and break the law.  
   ___ C. Prohibition encouraged the formation of organized-crime empires that illegally manufactured, transported, and sold liquor.  
   ___ D. Prohibition, which banned alcoholic beverages in the United States from 1920 to 1933, resulted in much illegal activity.
2 Use the Topic to Lead You to the Main Idea

You already know that to find the main idea of a selection, you look first for a general statement. You then check to see if that statement is supported by most of the other material in the paragraph. If it is, you’ve found the main idea. Another approach that can help you find the main idea is to decide on the topic of a given selection.

The topic is the general subject of a selection. It can often be expressed in one or more words. Knowing the topic can help you find a writer’s main point about that topic. Paying close attention to the topic of a selection can lead you to the main idea.

Textbook authors use the title of each chapter to state the overall topic of that chapter. They also provide many topics and subtopics in boldface headings within the chapter. For example, here is the title of a chapter in a psychology textbook:

Theories of Human Development (26 pages)

And here are the subtopics:

- Psychoanalytic Theories (an 8-page section)
- Learning Theories (a 9-page section)
- Cognitive Theories (a 9-page section)

If you were studying the above chapter, you could use the topics to help find the main ideas. (Pages 9–10 explain just how to do so, as well as other textbook study tips.)

But there are many times when you are not given topics—with standardized reading tests, for example, or with individual paragraphs in articles or textbooks. To find the topic of a selection when the topic is not given, ask this simple question:

Who or what is the selection about?

For example, look again at the beginning of the paragraph that started this chapter:

Many people feel that violence on television is harmless entertainment. However, we now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways.

What, in just a few words, is the above paragraph about? On the line below, write what you think is the topic.

Topic: ______________________________________________________________

You probably answered that the topic is “TV violence.” As you reread the paragraph, you saw that, in fact, every sentence in it is about TV violence.

The next step after finding the topic is to decide what main point the author is making about the topic. Authors often present their main idea in a single sentence. (This sentence is also known as the main idea sentence or the topic sentence.) As we have already seen, the main point about TV violence is “we now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways.”
Check Your Understanding

Let’s look now at another paragraph. Read it and then see if you can answer the questions that follow.

1. Recently a family of four was found dead in a suburban home in New Jersey—victims of carbon monoxide. Such cases are tragically common. Carbon monoxide is deadly for many reasons. To begin with, it is created in the most ordinary of ways—by the burning of wood, coal, or petroleum products. Once created, this gas is impossible to detect without instruments: it is colorless, odorless, and tasteless. Also, carbon monoxide mingles with and remains in the air rather than rising and being carried away by the wind. Then, when people unsuspectingly breathe it in, it chokes them, taking the place of the oxygen in their blood. Furthermore, it can do its lethal work in very small quantities: anyone exposed to air that is just 1 percent carbon monoxide for even a few minutes will almost certainly die.

1. What is the topic of the paragraph? In other words, what is the paragraph about? (It often helps as you read to look for and even circle a word, term, or idea that is repeated in the paragraph.)

__________________________________________________________

2. What is the main idea of the paragraph? In other words, what point is the author making about the topic? (Remember that the main idea will be supported by the other material in the paragraph.)

__________________________________________________________

Explanation

As the first sentence of the paragraph suggests, the topic is “carbon monoxide.” Continuing to read the paragraph, you see that, in fact, everything in it is about carbon monoxide. And the main idea is clearly that “Carbon monoxide is deadly for many reasons.” This idea is a general one that sums up what the entire paragraph is about. It is an “umbrella” statement under which all the other material in the paragraph fits. The parts of the paragraph could be shown as follows:

**Topic:** Carbon monoxide

**Main idea:** Carbon monoxide is deadly for many reasons.

**Supporting details:**
1. Is easily created.
2. Is difficult to detect.
3. Remains in the air.
4. Chokes by taking the place of oxygen in the blood.
5. Deadly even in small quantities.
The following practices will sharpen your sense of the difference between a topic, the point about the topic (the main idea), and supporting details.

**PRACTICE 6**

Below are groups of four items. In each case, one item is the topic, one is the main idea, and two are details that support and develop the main idea. Label each item with one of the following:

- **T** — for the **topic** of the paragraph
- **MI** — for the **main idea**
- **SD** — for the **supporting details**

Note that an explanation is provided for the first group; reading it will help you do this practice.

**Group 1**

_____ A. One bite from a piranha’s triangular-shaped teeth can sever a person’s finger or toe.

_____ B. The piranha.

_____ C. The piranha—only eight to twelve inches long—is an extremely dangerous fish.

_____ D. A school of piranha can strip a four-hundred-pound hog down to a skeleton in just a few minutes.

*Explanation*

All of the statements in Group 1 are about piranhas, so item B must be the topic. (Topics are easy to identify because they are expressed in short phrases, not complete sentences.) Statements A and D are specific examples of the damage that piranhas can do. Statement C, on the other hand, presents the general idea that piranhas can be extremely dangerous. It is the main idea about the topic of “the piranha,” and statements A and D are supporting details that illustrate that main idea.

**Group 2**

_____ A. Joint custody of a divorced couple’s children has become more common.

_____ B. The number of men with sole custody of children has also grown.

_____ C. Alternatives to giving the mother sole child custody have increased in recent years.

_____ D. Alternative child-custody arrangements.
Group 3

A. In later adulthood, we begin to come to terms with our own mortality.
B. Stages of human development.
C. Adolescence is typically a time of identity crisis.
D. According to psychologists, we pass through various stages of human development throughout our lives.

Group 4

A. Kinds of power.
B. Force, which the Italian statesman Machiavelli called “the method of beasts,” is the use of physical coercion.
C. Influence, the ability to control or affect the behavior of others, is also a form of power.
D. Power, the ability to control or change the behavior of others, takes different forms.

Practice 7

Following are four paragraphs. Read each paragraph and do the following:

1. Ask yourself, “What seems to be the topic of the paragraph?” (It often helps to look for and even circle a word or idea that is repeated in the paragraph.)
2. Next, ask yourself, “What point is the writer making about this topic?” This will be the main idea. It is stated in one of the sentences in the paragraph.
3. Then test what you think is the main idea by asking, “Is this statement supported by most of the other material in the paragraph?”

Hint: When looking for the topic, make sure you do not pick one that is either too broad (covering a great deal more than is in the selection) or too narrow (covering only part of the selection). The topic and the main idea of a selection must include everything in that selection—no more and no less.

For instance, in the example given in Practice 1, page 58, the topic is “bad qualities.” “Character traits” would be too broad, because these would include good qualities as well as bad qualities. “Greed” would be too narrow, since this is only one type of bad quality mentioned.
Paragraph 1

1. Shocking as it seems, cannibalism is common in the animal world. In species such as the red-back spider, the black widow spider, the praying mantis, and the scorpion, the female commonly eats the male after mating. Another widespread form of cannibalism is size-structured cannibalism, in which large individuals consume smaller ones. Octopus, bats, toads, fish, monitor lizards, salamanders, crocodiles, spiders, crustaceans, birds, mammals, and a vast number of insects have all been observed to engage in size-structured cannibalism. Yet another common form of cannibalism is infanticide. Classic examples include the chimpanzees, where groups of adult males have been observed to attack their infants; and lions, where adult males commonly kill infants when they take over a new harem after replacing the previous dominant males. Also, gerbils and hamsters eat their young if they are stillborn, or if the mothers are especially stressed.

1. What is the topic of the paragraph? In other words, what (in one or more words) is the paragraph about? _________________________________

2. What point is the writer making about the topic? In other words, which sentence states the main idea of the paragraph? In the space provided, write the number of the sentence containing the main idea.

Paragraph 2

1. The Great Wall of China is a truly remarkable creation. At 4,500 miles long, taller than five men, and wide enough to allow at least six horses to gallop side by side atop it, the Great Wall is so huge it can be seen from space. The Wall is constructed of four-inch blocks made of compressed earth, stone, willow twigs, and the remains of laborers who died among the millions who worked on its construction. The Great Wall follows mountain slopes and has inclines as great as seventy degrees. The paths on the Wall are even more difficult to travel because the steps are of uneven depth, width, and height. Through much of its 2,500-year history, armies marched and camped on the Wall, keeping lookout for invaders and repelling trespassers who dared to pitch ladders to try to mount it. Today the Great Wall is a tourist attraction that brings many visitors to China. Tourists are eager to make the strenuous hike over precarious paths to take in the greatness of its size and history.

1. What is the topic of the paragraph? In other words, what (in one or more words) is the paragraph about? _________________________________

2. What point is the writer making about the topic? In other words, which sentence states the main idea of the paragraph? In the space provided, write the number of the sentence containing the main idea.
Paragraph 3

At the beginning of the twentieth century, families often hired older women known as chaperones to keep watch over their daughters. These women played an important role in courtship. When a young man asked a girl on a date, he automatically invited her chaperone as well. If a young lady entertained her boyfriend in the parlor, the chaperone did not budge from the room. Because of her responsibilities, the chaperone had the power to make courtship pleasurable or miserable. Some chaperones had soft hearts and gave young lovers some privacy. Others were such sticklers for appearances that they prevented the young couple even from exchanging personal remarks. In addition to being guardians, chaperones sometimes functioned as private eyes. They investigated the backgrounds of gentlemen who called on their charges to see which one would make the best match.

1. What is the topic of the paragraph? In other words, what (in one or more words) is the paragraph about? __________________________________________

2. What point is the writer making about the topic? In other words, which sentence states the main idea of the paragraph? In the space provided, write the number of the sentence containing the main idea.

Paragraph 4

Cardiovascular disease—disease of the heart or blood vessels—is the leading cause of death in the United States, killing about 1 million people a year. Cardiovascular disease is actually a group of disorders. This group includes high blood pressure, or hypertension, which significantly increases the risk of other diseases in the group. Atherosclerosis, or coronary artery disease, is another member of the group. In this cardiovascular disorder, a fatty deposit, plaque, builds up on the walls of the arteries, restricting the flow of blood and causing strain to the heart, which must work harder to pump blood through the narrowed arteries. Sometimes an aneurysm occurs: the artery ruptures. Heart attack—technically, myocardial infarction—is also in this group. It happens when plaque builds up so much that blood flow to the heart is cut off and some heart muscle dies. Congestive heart failure, a chronic disease, is part of the group as well. In this disorder the heart has been weakened and can no longer pump enough blood. Stroke, too, is a cardiovascular disease: it occurs when blood flow to the brain is restricted or cut off.

1. What is the topic of the paragraph? In other words, what (in one or more words) is the paragraph about? __________________________________________

2. What point is the writer making about the topic? In other words, which sentence states the main idea of the paragraph? In the space provided, write the number of the sentence containing the main idea.
CHAPTER 2 Main Ideas

3 Find and Use Key Words to Lead You to the Main Idea

Sometimes authors make it fairly easy to find their main idea. They announce it using key words—verbal clues that are easy to recognize. One group of these is list words, which tell you a list of items will follow. For example, the main idea in the paragraph about TV violence was stated like this: “However, we now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways.” The expression negative ways helps you zero in on your target: the main idea. You realize that the paragraph will most likely be about specific ways that TV violence affects people. As you read on and see the series of negative effects, you know your assumption about the main idea was correct.

Here are some common word groups that often announce a main idea. Note that each of them contains a word that ends in s—a plural that suggests the supporting details will be a list of items.

**List Words**

| several kinds (or ways) of | several causes of | some factors in |
|  three advantages of |  five steps |  among the results |
|  various reasons for |  a number of effects |  a series of |

When expressions like these appear in a sentence, look carefully to see if that sentence might be the main idea. Chances are a sentence containing list words will be followed by a list of major supporting details.

---

**Check Your Understanding**

Underline the list words in the following sentences.

*Hint:* Remember that list words usually end in s.

**Example** Emotional decisions can be divided into two main types.

1. At least five job trends deserve watching in today’s world.

2. Pathologists identify four different stages of cancer in the body.

3. Several steps can be effective in helping people deal with prejudice.

4. Winners of presidential elections share various traits in common.

5. Giving birth to and raising a child will require a number of adjustments in the parents’ lives.
**Explanation**
You should have underlined the following groups of words: *five job trends, four different stages, several steps, various traits, and a number of adjustments.* Each of these phrases tells you that a list of details may follow.

In addition to list words, addition words can alert you to the main idea. **Addition words** are generally used right before supporting details. When you see this type of clue, you can assume that the detail it introduces fits under the umbrella of a main idea.

Here are some of the addition words that often introduce supporting details and help you discover the main idea.

**Addition Words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>one</th>
<th>to begin with</th>
<th>also</th>
<th>further</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>first (of all)</td>
<td>for one thing</td>
<td>in addition</td>
<td>furthermore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second(ly)</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>next</td>
<td>last (of all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third(ly)</td>
<td>another</td>
<td>moreover</td>
<td>final(ly)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Check Your Understanding**

Reread the paragraph about TV violence, underlining the addition words that alert you to supporting details.

1. Many people feel that violence on television is harmless entertainment.
2. However, we now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways.
3. One study showed that frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others.
4. They try to protect themselves from the outside world with extra locks on the doors, alarm systems, guard dogs, and guns.
5. In addition, that same study showed that heavy TV watchers are less upset about real-life violence than non-TV watchers.
6. It seems that the constant violence they see on TV makes them less sensitive to the real thing.
7. Another study, of a group of children, found that TV violence increases aggressive behavior.
8. Children who watched violent shows were more willing to hurt another child in games where they were given a choice between helping and hurting.
9. They were also more likely to select toy weapons over other kinds of playthings.
**Explanation**

The words that introduce each new supporting detail for the main idea are *One, In addition, and Another*. When you see these addition words, you realize the studies are all being cited in support of an idea—in this case, that TV violence affects people in negative ways.

That main idea includes the list words *negative ways*, which suggest that the supporting details will be a list of negative ways TV violence affects people. In this and many paragraphs, list words and addition words often work hand in hand.

The following chapter, “Supporting Details,” includes further practice in the words and phrases that alert you to the main idea and the details that support it. But what you have already learned here will help you find main ideas.

**Locations of the Main Idea**

Now you know how to recognize a main idea by 1) distinguishing between the general and the specific, 2) identifying the topic of a passage, and 3) using key words. You are ready to find the main idea no matter where it is located in a paragraph.

A main idea may appear at any point within a paragraph. Very commonly, it shows up at the beginning, as either the first or the second sentence. However, main ideas may also appear further within a paragraph or even at the very end.

**Main Idea at the Beginning**

In textbooks, it is very common for the main idea to be either the first or the second sentence of a paragraph.

See if you can underline the main idea in the paragraph on the following page.
For shy people, simply attending class can be stressful. Several strategies, though, can lessen the trauma of attending class for shy people. Shy students should time their arrival to coincide with that of most other class members—about two minutes before the class is scheduled to begin. If they arrive too early, they may be seen sitting alone or, even worse, may actually be forced to talk with another early arrival. If they arrive late, all eyes will be upon them. Before heading to class, shy students should dress in the least conspicuous manner possible—say, in the blue jeans, sweatshirt, and sneakers that 99.9 percent of their classmates wear. That way they won’t stand out from everyone else. They should take a seat near the back of the room. But they shouldn’t sit at the very back, since instructors sometimes make a point of calling on students there.

In this paragraph, the main idea is in the first sentence. All the following sentences in the paragraph provide a detailed example of how we cling to first impressions.

Check Your Understanding

Now read the following paragraph and see if you can underline its main idea:

People tend to cling to their first impressions, even if they are wrong. Suppose you mention the name of your new neighbor to a friend. “Oh, I know him,” your friend replies. “He seems nice at first, but it’s all an act.” Perhaps this appraisal is off-base. The neighbor may have changed since your friend knew him, or perhaps your friend’s judgment is simply unfair. Whether the judgment is accurate or not, once you accept your friend’s evaluation, it will probably influence the way you respond to the neighbor. You’ll look for examples of the insincerity you’ve heard about, and you’ll probably find them. Even if this neighbor were a saint, you would be likely to interpret his behavior in ways that fit your expectations.

In this paragraph, the main idea is in the first sentence. All the following sentences in the paragraph provide a detailed example of how we cling to first impressions.

**Check Your Understanding**

Now read the following paragraph and see if you can underline its main idea:

For shy people, simply attending class can be stressful. Several strategies, though, can lessen the trauma of attending class for shy people. Shy students should time their arrival to coincide with that of most other class members—about two minutes before the class is scheduled to begin. If they arrive too early, they may be seen sitting alone or, even worse, may actually be forced to talk with another early arrival. If they arrive late, all eyes will be upon them. Before heading to class, shy students should dress in the least conspicuous manner possible—say, in the blue jeans, sweatshirt, and sneakers that 99.9 percent of their classmates wear. That way they won’t stand out from everyone else. They should take a seat near the back of the room. But they shouldn’t sit at the very back, since instructors sometimes make a point of calling on students there.

**Explanation**

In the above paragraph, the main idea is stated in the second sentence. The first sentence introduces the topic, shy people in class, but it is the idea in the second sentence—several strategies can lessen the trauma of attending class for shy people—that is supported in the rest of the paragraph. So keep in mind that the first sentence may simply introduce or lead into the main idea of a paragraph.

**Hint:** Very often, a contrast word like however, but, yet, or though signals the main idea, as in the paragraph you have just read.
Main Idea in the Middle

The main idea at times appears in the middle of a paragraph. Here is an example of a paragraph in which the main idea is somewhere in the middle. Try to find it and underline it. Then read the explanation that follows.

1 A television ad for a new sports car showed scenes of beautiful open country that suggested freedom and adventure.  2 The car never appeared in the ad at all.  3 An ad for a hotel chain showed a romantic couple in bed together.  4 They were obviously on vacation and having a leisurely, romantic, sexy morning.  5 As these ads suggest, advertisers often try to sell products and services by associating them with positive images rather than by providing relevant details about the product or service.  6 An ad giving the car’s gas mileage, safety rating, or repair frequency would be more important to a buyer, but it might not draw the viewer’s interest as much as beautiful scenery.  7 Similarly, details on the hotel’s prices and service would be more informative than images of a glamorous vacation.  8 But the romantic couple gets people’s attention and associates the hotel in viewers’ minds with a good time.

If you thought the fifth sentence gives the main idea, you were correct. The first four sentences introduce the topic of advertisers and provide specific examples of the main idea. The fifth sentence then presents the writer’s main idea, which is that advertisers often try to sell their products by associating them with appealing images rather than with relevant details. The rest of the paragraph continues to develop that idea.

Main Idea at the End

Sometimes all the sentences in a paragraph will lead up to the main idea, which is presented at the end. Here is an example of such a paragraph.

1 Only about 1 percent of insect species are destructive to crops and property.
Nevertheless, this small group causes several billion dollars of damage each year in the United States alone. Harmful insects include household pests, such as termites; crop and livestock pests, such as boll weevils; and hosts of disease-causing organisms, such as mosquitoes infected with parasitic protozoa. Many insects, on the other hand, are beneficial to human society. Some insects pollinate fruit trees, flowers, and many field crops. Bees produce honey and beeswax, silkworms form cocoons from which silk is spun, and lac insects provide the raw material for commercial shellac. Some kinds of insects are natural enemies of destructive insects. For example, the larvae of certain wasps feed on caterpillars that destroy plants. Clearly, insects are both harmful and beneficial to human society.

Main Idea at the Beginning and the End

At times an author may choose to state the main idea near the beginning of the paragraph and then emphasize it (as a conclusion) by restating it in other words later in the paragraph. In such cases, the main idea is at both the beginning and the end. Such is the case in the following paragraph.

An important result of medical advances is an increase in the number of conditions thought to be of medical concern. In the not-too-distant past, birth and death usually occurred at home. Family members and friends were there or close by. Now most people are born and die in a hospital, surrounded by bright lights and expensive machines. People who were addicted to alcohol or drugs were once considered sinful or lacking in willpower. Now they are considered “sick.” Problems that used to be accepted as part of life—baldness, wrinkles, small breasts, sleeplessness—are now deemed proper matters for medical attention. Some criminologists have even defined antisocial behavior as a medical problem. Lawbreakers of all kinds, from the shoplifter to the mass murderer, may potentially be labeled “sick.” Because of current medical knowledge, what were once thought to be problems of life or of character are now considered medical issues.

Note that the main idea—because of medical advances, more problems are considered medical issues—is expressed in different words in the first and last sentences.
The main ideas of the following paragraphs appear at different locations—in the beginning, somewhere in the middle, or at the end. Identify each main idea by filling in its sentence number in the space provided.

_____ 1. ¹Many people think of thieves as clever. ²In reality, thieves can be remarkably foolish. ³One evening, a Los Angeles woman was walking her miniature poodle when a man came up behind her, pushed her to the ground, grabbed the plastic bag she was holding, and drove away. ⁴Afterward, when asked about the mugging, the woman cheerfully commented, “I only wish there had been more in the bag.” ⁵The woman had used the bag when she cleaned up her dog’s messes. ⁶In Baltimore, an even dumber burglar broke into a house while the woman who lived there was home, ransacked the place, and, having found only $11.50 in cash, demanded that the victim write him a check for $30. ⁷When the woman asked to whom she should make the check payable, the thief gave his own name, in full. ⁸He was arrested a few hours later. ⁹But an Oklahoma thief may have been dumbest of all. ¹⁰Charged with purse-snatching, he decided to act as his own attorney. ¹¹At his trial, he cross-examined the victim: “Did you get a good look at my face when I took your purse?” ¹²Not surprisingly, he was convicted.

_____ 2. ¹For 250 million years, reptiles—which appeared on Earth long before the first mammals—have been fighting over territory. ²Today, human beings do battle over property as well. ³But the reptiles’ way of fighting is generally more civilized and humane than the humans’. ⁴Lizards will take a few rushes at one another to test which one is stronger. ⁵After a few passes, the loser rolls over on his back to signal defeat. ⁶The winner allows him to leave unharmed. ⁷Rattlesnakes, similarly, will duel over territory. ⁸But they do it with their necks twined together so that they cannot injure each other with their fangs. ⁹Humans, of course, generally fight with the intent of injuring one another. ¹⁰The victor often seems to feel he hasn’t really won until he’s wounded and humiliated his opponent, if not killed him.

_____ 3. ¹If asked to describe ourselves, most of us would not answer that we are mostly water, but that’s exactly what we are. ²A 150-pound person is actually 100 pounds of water and only 50 pounds of everything else. ³Our blood plasma is 92% water, and our brains are 75% water. ⁴We use the expression “dry as a bone,” but in fact our bones are not dry at all—they are about 20% water.
Our “inner sea” is constantly in motion, flowing through us every moment, bringing food and oxygen to our cells, carrying away wastes, lubricating our joints, cushioning our brains and regulating our temperatures. If the percentage of water in our bodies drops even 1 or 2 percent, we feel thirsty. A drop of 10% is usually fatal. Every day, we lose about two and a half quarts of water. Surprisingly, we replace less than half this lost water through drinking. The rest we replenish with food which, just like us, is mostly water. A tomato, for example, is over 87% water, which is released into the body when we eat it.

Today, as many as one and a half million children are believed to be homeschooled; twenty years ago, only 12,500 students were educated at home. This dramatic increase in the number of homeschooled children can be explained in part by the growth of membership in fundamentalist Christianity, whose members often choose to educate their children at home. While religious motivation is the reason that most families choose homeschooling, it is not the only reason. A number of reasons draw parents to homeschooling. Some parents prefer to educate their children in the security of their own homes away from the dangers of guns and violence in many urban schools today. Other parents believe that homeschooling provides their children a more intimate and nurturing learning environment. Economics can also play a role. One parent can stay home and be a home teacher, saving the high cost of childcare. Finally, motivations can even be negative: sometimes racism, anti-Semitism, or some other hateful reason can cause parents to reject public schooling for homeschooling.

The Central Point

Just as a paragraph may have a main idea, a longer selection may have a central point, also known as a central idea or thesis. The longer selection might be an essay, a reading, or a section of a textbook chapter. You can find a central point in the same way that you find a main idea—by identifying the topic (which is often suggested by the title of the selection) and then looking at the supporting material. The paragraphs within the longer reading will provide supporting details for the central point.
Check Your Understanding

In the following essay, the central point is stated in one sentence. See if you can find and underline this sentence. Then write its number in the space provided.

Peer Pressure

1. We often hear about the dangers of peer pressure to teenagers. 2. Teens take drugs, skip school, get drunk, or have sex to impress their friends. 3. However, there is another, perhaps equally bad, effect of peer pressure. 4. Desperate to conform to their friends’ values, teens may give up their interests in school, in hobbies, and even in certain people.

5. Teens may lose or hide their interest in school in order to be like their friends. 6. They adopt a negative attitude in which school is seen as a battlefield, with teachers and other officials regarded as the enemy. 7. In private, they may enjoy certain teachers, but in front of their friends, they put on a sarcastic or hostile act. 8. In addition, teenagers may stop participating in class. 9. They may refuse to join in class discussions, even when the topic interests them. 10. They may decide it is cool to show up without the assigned homework. 11. If their peers demand it, they may interfere with others’ learning by disrupting class. 12. Conforming also means not joining in after-school activities.

13. Teenagers also give up private pleasures and hobbies to be one of the crowd. 14. Certain pastimes, such as writing poems, practicing piano, reading books, or joining an after-school club may be off-limits because the crowd laughs at them.

15. Most sadly, teenagers sometimes give up the people they love in order to be accepted. 16. If necessary, they sacrifice the old friend who no longer dresses well enough, listens to the wrong kind of music, or refuses to drink or take drugs. 17. Potential boyfriends or girlfriends may be rejected, too, if the crowd doesn’t like their looks or values. 18. Teens can even cut their families out of their lives if they are too poor, too conventional, or too different from their friends’ parents.

_____ is the number of the sentence that states the central point.

Explanation

The central point is a general statement that covers all or most of the details in a reading. To find the central point of the essay above, look first at its topic. Since the title is “Peer Pressure,” and every paragraph is about that subject, we can say “peer pressure” is the topic. Then decide on what point is being made about the topic by looking at the major details of the essay. The first major detail, presented in the second paragraph, is about giving up interest in school as a result of peer pressure. The next major detail, in the third paragraph, is about giving up interest in hobbies; and the third major detail, in the fourth paragraph, is about giving up
interest in certain people.

The central point, then, will be a general statement that covers all of the major details presented. As is often the case, the central point is stated in the first paragraph. Sentence 4 in that paragraph expresses the idea that peer pressure may cause students to give up interest in school, in hobbies, and in certain people.

**PRACTICE 9**

The author has stated the central point of the following textbook selection in one sentence. Find that sentence, and write its number in the space provided.

**Prewriting Strategies**

1. Prewriting refers to strategies you can use to generate ideas before starting the first draft of a paper.
2. Prewriting techniques have various advantages.
3. They encourage imaginative exploration and therefore also help you discover what interests you most about your subject.
4. Having such a focus early in the writing process keeps you from plunging into your initial draft without first giving some thought to what you want to say.
5. Prewriting thus saves you time in the long run by keeping you on course.
6. Prewriting can help in other ways, too.
7. When we write, we often interfere with our ability to generate material because we continually critique what we put down on paper.
8. “This makes no sense,” “This is stupid,” “I can’t say that,” and other critical thoughts pop into our minds.
9. Such negative, self-critical comments stop the flow of our thoughts and reinforce the fear that we have nothing to say and aren’t very good at writing.
10. During prewriting, you deliberately ignore your internal critic.
11. Your purpose is simply to get ideas down on paper without evaluating their effectiveness.
12. Writing without immediately judging what you produce can be liberating.
13. Once you feel less pressure, you’ll probably find that you can generate a good deal of material.
14. And that can make your confidence soar.
15. One final advantage of prewriting: The random associations typical of prewriting tap the mind’s ability to make unusual connections.
16. When you prewrite, you’re like an archaeologist going on a dig.
17. On the one hand, you may not unearth anything; on the other hand, you may stumble upon one interesting find after another.
18. Prewriting helps you appreciate—right from the start—this element of surprise in the writing process.

_____ is the number of the sentence that states the central point.
A Final Thought

Whether we are readers, writers, listeners, or speakers, the “heart” of clear communication is the main idea, or point, and the support for the main idea. Look at the following diagram:

The diagram underscores the importance of the most important of all reading skills: the ability to identify main ideas. The diagram also shows that the ability to identify supporting details for the main idea is an almost equally important skill.
CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter, you learned the following:

- Recognizing the main idea is the most important key to good comprehension. The main idea is a general “umbrella” idea; all the specific supporting material of the passage fits under it.

- Three strategies that will help you find the main idea are to 1) look for general versus specific ideas; 2) use the topic (the general subject of a selection) to lead you to the main idea; 3) use key words—verbal clues that lead you to the main idea.

- The main idea often appears at the beginning of a paragraph, though it may appear elsewhere in a paragraph.

The next chapter—Chapter 3—will sharpen your understanding of the specific details that authors use to support and develop their main ideas.

On the Web: If you are using this book in class, you can visit our website for additional practice in recognizing main ideas. Go to www.townsendpress.com and click on “Online Learning Center.”
REVIEW TEST 1

To review what you’ve learned in this chapter, answer the following questions by filling in the blank or writing the letter of the correct answer.

1. To become an active reader, you need to think as you read by constantly asking yourself the question, “What is the _____________?”

2. One strategy that will help you find the main idea is to look for the ________________—the general subject of a selection.

3. What kind of writing typically provides many topics and subtopics that will help you find main ideas?
   A. Magazines   B. Fiction books   C. Textbooks

4. Two benefits, three reasons, four steps, five effects are all examples of ________________ that can help you find main ideas.

5. While a main idea may appear at any point within a paragraph, in textbooks it most often appears at the _________________.

REVIEW TEST 2

A. In each of the following groups, one statement is the general point, and the other statements are specific support for the point. Identify each point with a P and each statement of support with an S.

1. ___ A. In urban areas, infant mortality is 25 percent higher than the national average.
   ___ B. Urban children face greater risks than other children.
   ___ C. Forty percent of urban children live below the poverty level.
   ___ D. Between 30 and 50 percent of urban children are inadequately immunized.
2. ___ A. The night before a fox hunt, “earth stoppers” roam the countryside filling in fox holes and other burrows to prevent a hunted fox from escaping underground.

___ B. During the hunt, the fox is pursued—sometimes for hours—by dozens of hounds followed by mounted hunters; a fox caught by hounds is torn apart.

___ C. Many fox hunters practice “blooding,” a ritual in which blood from a killed fox is smeared on the cheeks of children attending their first hunt.

___ D. There are good reasons to find fox hunting bizarre and cruel.

B. Each group of statements below includes one topic, one main idea, and two supporting details. In the space provided, label each item with one of the following:

T — for the topic of the paragraph
MI — for the main idea
SD — for the supporting details

Group 1

_____ A. Lack of exercise leads to “older” joints and muscles.

_____ B. Signs of aging.

_____ C. Smoking and spending a great deal of time in the sun lead to wrinkling.

_____ D. Everyday habits can produce signs of aging.

Group 2

_____ A. Many students now do much of their learning using online computers.

_____ B. Modern technology is changing the very nature of our educational system.

_____ C. Technology’s effect on education.

_____ D. Students have begun to use wireless reading devices that can hold the information in thousands of books.
A. The main idea appears at various places in the following paragraphs. Write the number of each main idea in the space provided.

_____ 1. Individuals sometimes develop amazing strengths by uniting to overcome trouble. At the end of World War II, for example, a group of six children who had lost their parents, their homeland, and their native language were freed from a concentration camp. They were so strongly attached to one another that they refused to be separated even when one became ill with a contagious disease. In the refugee hostel, they resisted being singled out for treats. At mealtimes, each made certain the other five had food before eating. Only after several months had passed and they knew their safety was assured did they show the competitiveness and need for attention normal children do.

_____ 2. Among the tasks of public schools is the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Evidence makes clear, though, that public schools often do not succeed in teaching the basic skills. As many as one young adult in three is functionally illiterate—that is, unable to read at an eighth-grade level. The rate of functional illiteracy among minority youth is even higher than the national average: about 40 percent. Few seventeen-year-olds can express their thoughts effectively in writing. Even when their spelling and grammar are adequate, they use short, childlike sentences and cannot organize coherent paragraphs. And although young adults can perform basic mathematical operations, they have trouble using these operations to solve problems. Less than half can read a federal income tax table, and just 1 percent can balance a checkbook.

_____ 3. After experiencing an extremely shocking event, some people will continue to reexperience it through dreams and recollections. They may even reexperience it through a flashback—the sudden feeling that one is back in the traumatic experience. They may also feel a sense of emotional “numbness,” as if their bodies have shut down in order to protect them from further emotional damage. They may avoid any stimuli that remind them of the traumatic event. This collection of symptoms, called posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), afflicts people who have experienced any of various seriously damaging experiences. PTSD is best known because of its association with Vietnam and Iraqi War veterans. But it is also often found in individuals who have been victims of violent crimes such as rape or extreme child abuse.
B. (4.) The author has stated the central point of the following textbook selection in one sentence. Find that sentence, and write its number in the space provided.

A Medical Mystery

1Medical researchers were perplexed. 2Reports were coming in from all over the country indicating that women, who live longer than men, were twice as likely to die after coronary bypass surgery. 3Medical records at one hospital showed that of almost 2,300 coronary bypass patients, 4.6 percent of the women died as a result of the surgery, compared with only 2.6 percent of the men.

4Initial explanations were based on biology. 5Coronary bypass surgery involves taking a blood vessel from one part of the body and stitching it to a coronary artery on the surface of the heart. 6This operation was supposedly more difficult to perform on women because of their smaller hearts and coronary arteries. 7But researchers who tested this theory soon found that the operation was not more difficult to perform on women.

8As the researchers continued to probe, a surprising answer slowly unfolded: The cause of the greater number of deaths of women after bypass surgery was sexual discrimination by physicians. 9They simply did not take the chest pains of their women patients as seriously as those of their men patients. 10Physicians were ten times more likely to give men exercise stress tests and radioactive heart scans. 11And they sent men to surgery on the basis of abnormal stress tests but waited until women showed clear-cut symptoms of coronary heart disease before recommending surgery. 12Being referred for surgery later in the course of the disease decreases the chances of survival.

_____ is the number of the sentence that states the central point.
Here is a chance to apply your understanding of main ideas to a textbook passage. Read the passage below, and then answer the questions that follow on main ideas. There are also vocabulary questions to help you continue practicing the skill of understanding vocabulary in context.

Words to Watch

Below are some words in the reading that do not have strong context support. Each word is followed by the number of the paragraph in which it appears and its meaning there. These words are indicated in the article by a small circle (°).

- **tangible** (1): concrete
- **afloat** (7): out of difficulty
- **perception** (7): judgment
- **longitudinal survey** (7): a study that follows the same people over a period of time

The growing number of marriages in which both husband and wife are gainfully employed presents both opportunities and challenges. A second income raises some families from poverty to middle-income status and makes others affluent. It makes women more independent and gives them a greater share of economic power, and it reduces the pressure on men to be providers; 47 percent of working wives contribute half or more of family income. Less tangible benefits may include a more equal relationship between husband and wife, better health for both, greater self-esteem for the woman, and a closer relationship between a father and his children. However, this way of life also creates stress. Working couples face extra demands on time and energy, conflicts between work and family, possible rivalry between spouses, and anxiety and guilt about meeting children’s needs. Each role makes greater or lesser demands at different times, and partners have to decide which should take priority when. The family is most demanding, especially for women, when there are young children. Careers are especially
demanding when a worker is getting established or being promoted. Both kinds of demands frequently occur in young adulthood.

3 Men and women tend to be stressed by different aspects of the work-family situation. Among 314 spouses with relatively high income and education, husbands were more likely to suffer from overload (perhaps because they had not been socialized to deal with domestic as well as occupational responsibilities). Women, on the other hand, were more likely to feel the strain of conflicting role expectations—for example, the need to be aggressive and competitive at work but compassionate and nurturing at home.

4 Temporary withdrawal from social interaction after a busy workday helped settle men down and softened the effects of overload. “Talking things over” seemed to worsen their stress, perhaps because they were uncomfortable expressing feelings or because the outcome of such discussions might be even greater demands. For both men and women, the most successful way of coping was rethinking the way they looked at the situation.

5 Dual-income couples fall into three patterns: conventional, modern, and role sharing. In a conventional marriage, both partners consider household chores and childcare “women’s work.” The husband may “help,” but his career comes first; he earns more than his wife and sees it as “her choice” to add outside employment to her primary domestic role. In modern couples, the wife does most of the housework, but the husband shares parenting and wants to be involved with his children. In the role-sharing pattern, characteristic of at least one-third of dual-income marriages, both husband and wife are actively involved in household and family responsibilities as well as careers. However, even among such couples, tasks tend to be gender-typed: wives buy the groceries and husbands mow the lawn.

Men, on average, earn more and have more powerful positions than women. But in general, the burdens of the dual-earner lifestyle fall most heavily on the woman. Women tend to work more hours—20 percent more in industrialized countries and 30 percent more in less developed countries. Women put in a longer “second shift” at home, as well. Although men’s participation has
been increasing, even husbands in non-traditional marriages still do only one-third of the domestic work. A Swedish study found that working women with three or more children put in one and a half times as many hours as men at home and on the job. A father is most likely to take on childcare when his work schedule is different from his wife’s.

Women’s personal activities tend to suffer more than men’s, probably owing to the disproportionate time they put into domestic work, and in the long run the compromises women make to keep the dual-earner lifestyle afloat may weaken the marriage. An unequal division of work may have contributed to the higher degree of marital distress reported by wives in a study of three hundred mostly managerial and professional dual-earner couples. On the other hand, unequal roles are not necessarily seen as inequitable; it may be a perception of unfairness that contributes most to marital instability. A national longitudinal survey of 3,284 women in two-income families found greater likelihood of divorce the more hours the woman worked, but only when the wife had a nontraditional view of marriage. Nontraditional wives who work full time may feel more resentment of their husbands’ failure to share equally in household tasks, whereas traditional wives may be more willing to accept additional burdens.

What spouses perceive as fair may depend on how much money the wife’s earnings contribute, whether she thinks of herself as someone who supplements her husband’s income, and what meaning and importance she and her husband place on her work. Whatever the actual division of labor, couples who agree on that division and who enjoy a more harmonious, caring, involved family life are more satisfied than those who don’t.

Family-friendly policies in the workplace can help alleviate the strains experienced by dual-earner families. A flexible work environment is one that could include part-time, flextime, and shared jobs. Supportive companies might also provide more at-home work (without loss of fringe benefits), more affordable high-quality childcare, and tax credits or other assistance to let new parents postpone returning to work. One encouraging change is the Family and Medical Leave Act, which requires businesses with fifty or more workers to offer twelve weeks of unpaid leave for the birth or adoption of a child.
Reading Comprehension Questions

Vocabulary in Context

_____ 1. In the sentence below, the word *socialized* (sō′shə-līzd′) means
A. afraid.
B. taught through experience.
C. paid well.
D. strong enough.

“Among 314 spouses with relatively high income and education, husbands were more likely to suffer from overload (perhaps because they had not been socialized to deal with domestic as well as occupational responsibilities).” (Paragraph 3)

_____ 2. In the sentence below, the word *conventional* (kən-vən′shə-nəl) means
A. convenient.
B. happy.
C. traditional.
D. modern.

“In a conventional marriage, both partners consider household chores and childcare ‘women’s work.’” (Paragraph 5)

_____ 3. In the excerpt below, the word *disproportionate* (dĭs′prə-pŏr′shə-nĭt) means
A. unequal in size.
B. too short.
C. equal.
D. late.

“Women’s personal activities tend to suffer more than men’s, probably owing to the disproportionate time they put into domestic work . . . ” (Paragraph 7)

_____ 4. In the sentence below, the word *inequitable* (ĭn-ĕk′wĭ-tə-bəl) means
A. fair.
B. surprising.
C. ideal.
D. unequal.

“On the other hand, unequal roles are not necessarily seen as inequitable; it may be a perception of unfairness that contributes most to marital instability.” (Paragraph 7)
Main Ideas

_____ 5. The main idea of paragraphs 1 and 2 is the
   A. first sentence of paragraph 1.
   B. second sentence of paragraph 1.
   C. first sentence of paragraph 2.
   D. last sentence of paragraph 2.

_____ 6. The main idea of paragraph 3 is its
   A. first sentence.
   B. second sentence.
   C. third sentence.

_____ 7. The main idea of paragraph 5 is its
   A. first sentence.
   B. second sentence.
   C. third sentence.
   D. last sentence.

_____ 8. The main idea of paragraph 6 is its
   A. first sentence.
   B. second sentence.
   C. third sentence.
   D. fourth sentence.

_____ 9. The topic of paragraph 9 is
   A. companies that support at-home work.
   B. the strains experienced by dual-earner families.
   C. family-friendly policies in the workplace.
   D. the Family and Medical Leave Act.

_____ 10. The main idea of paragraph 9 is its
    A. first sentence.
    B. second sentence.
    C. third sentence.
    D. last sentence.
Discussion Questions

1. Discuss some of the challenges in a dual-income marriage. Draw upon your own experience if you are married, or use the example of a married couple you know.

2. Discuss some of the benefits in a dual-income marriage. Again, draw upon your own experience if you are married, or use the example of a married couple you know.

3. The author states, “Dual-income couples fall into three patterns: conventional, modern, and role sharing.” What view of marriage did your family have as you grew up? How did that view affect your family’s lifestyle? If you’re married, which view do you and your spouse have?

4. How do you think dual-earner marriages affect children? What, if anything, can spouses who both work outside the home do to ensure that their children receive the time and attention they deserve?

Note: Writing assignments for this selection appear on pages 675–676.

Check Your Performance

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<th>Activity</th>
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TOTAL SCORE = _________%

Enter your total score into the Reading Performance Chart: Review Tests on the inside back cover.