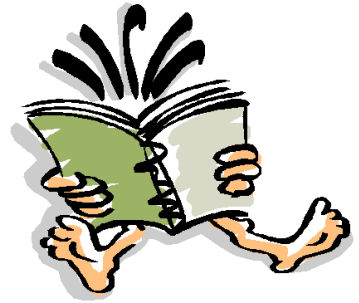


# Finding the Main Idea: A Reading Strategy



How many times have you been asked, "**What's the main idea of this paragraph?**" in your Science, Social Studies or LA classes? And how many times have you wanted to say, "**I have no clue!**"?

Finding the main idea is an important reading strategy and comprehension skill to master. Knowing the main idea of the entire selection helps you to **remember important details**. The main idea also gives you a **purpose for reading**.

Be careful not to confuse the topic of a passage for the main idea.

**Topic:** Who or what the passage is about.

**Main idea:** The most important point the author is trying to make about the topic. Sometimes it is stated, but sometimes it is implied.

## Using the Strategy

1. Look at the **title**.
2. Look at the **text features** for clues.
3. Look for **key words** that are used repeatedly.
4. Sometimes the main idea is stated in the **first or last sentence**.
5. Ask yourself, "What is the selection **mostly about?**"

### ***Apollo 13***

*The movie Apollo 13 was a blockbuster for the summer of 1995. It is an exciting story about space exploration. In the movie, the astronauts get in trouble while they are trying to return to Earth. People in the audience are on the edge of their seats waiting to see what happens. What makes it even more exciting is that it is a true story.*



**What is the topic of the paragraph?**  
**What is the main idea of this paragraph?**

*Most teenagers and young adults do not know what they want to do for the rest of their lives. It is a big decision. There are a number of things you can do to narrow the choices. For example you can take an interest test, do some research on your own about a career, try volunteer work in the field in which you are interested, or "job-shadow", in which you spend a day with a person who is working in a field that interests you. These are just a few helpful ideas as you begin to choose a career.*

**What is the topic of the paragraph?**

**What is the main idea of this paragraph?**

*The United States seems to be in love with the idea of going out to eat. Because of this, a real variety of restaurants has come about specializing in all kinds of foods. McDonald's is the king of a subgroup of restaurants called fast-food restaurants. Chances are, no matter where you live, there is a McDonald's restaurant near you. There are even McDonald's restaurants in the Soviet Union. Now McDonald's is trying something new. It is called McDonald's Express and there is a test site in Peabody, Massachusetts. It is part of a Mobil gas station. This allows you to fill up with gas and fill up on food at the same time. What will they think of next?*

**What is the topic of the paragraph?**

**What is the main idea of this paragraph?**