

Finding Main Ideas: Quick Tips

- ✓ Remember that the topic will be the idea that all of the sentences in the paragraph relate to
- ✓ The main idea is what the author is saying about the topic (general statement)
- ✓ The supporting details are specific examples or pieces of information
- ✓ Just as paragraphs have topic sentences that contain the main idea, longer passages have thesis statements that contain the central idea

Give it a try!

¹Because the Internet exists in a world that is already regulated with policies and laws, government officials, upholders of current laws and the voice of the people, should be ultimately responsible for the regulation of the Internet. ²With this responsibility comes the enormous task of managing the protection of First Amendment rights along with honoring social and public interests across the world. ³That being said, responsibility still rests in the hands of Internet users who vote – they, along with the officials elected to serve them, make up the global community. ⁴Voters have the ability to elect responsible individuals to the appropriate posts, and the elected officials have the responsibility to act on the will of the people.

Which sentence in this paragraph states the main idea (the topic sentence):

- a. Sentence 1
- b. Sentence 2
- c. Sentence 3
- d. Sentence 4

Works Cited

“How to Find the Stated Main Idea.” *About Education*. About.com, 15 Dec 2014. Web. 23 May 2016.
Henry, D. J. *The Effective Reader*. 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 2011. Print.

Answer: a

Stated Main Ideas

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Stated Main Ideas

A main idea is the author's **controlling point** about a topic. It usually includes the topic and the author's attitude or opinion about the topic, or the author's approach to the topic.

No matter what you are reading, it is always important to understand the main idea(s).

How Do I Find Main Ideas?

To find the main idea of a passage, you need to know **two things**: *what the topic is*, and *what the author is saying about the topic*.

Start at the paragraph level. Ask yourself:

1. Who or what is the paragraph about? The answer to this question is the **topic**.
2. What statement is the author making about the topic? In other words, what is the author's controlling point? The answer to this question is the **main idea**.

Paragraph Structure

There is typically one sentence in each paragraph that states the main idea. This is the **topic sentence**.

What about the rest of the paragraph?

The other sentences in the paragraph are mostly **supporting details**. These sentences support the author's controlling point (the main idea)—they are often a list of reasons or examples. Supporting details are always specific, whereas the topic sentence contains a general statement. Remember, **all of the supporting details will relate to the main idea**.

Where can I find the topic sentence?

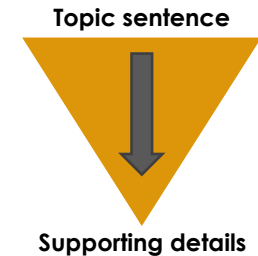
The topic sentence can be anywhere within a paragraph—at the beginning, in the middle, at the end, or even at both the beginning *and* the end.

When looking for the topic sentence, search for words connected to the topic that **limit or qualify the scope of the topic**. For example, adjectives such as *important*, *useful*, *necessary*, etc. might reveal an author's opinion/point.

You may also see clues about the way the author intends to discuss the topic (also known as the author's **thought pattern**). These might include phrases like “several ways,” or “many reasons” that signal that the author is going to go through a list of reasons/ways to support her/his main idea.

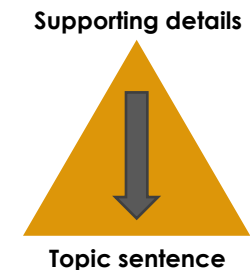
Topic sentences at or near the beginning of paragraphs

Paragraphs that begin with a topic sentence and move on to supporting details are organized from general statements to specific information. An *introductory sentence* may also precede the topic sentence.



Topic sentences at the end of paragraphs

Paragraphs that begin with supporting details and end with a topic sentence are organized from specific information to a general statement.



Beyond the Paragraph

Just like paragraphs, longer texts (such as essays, articles, and textbooks) also have a main idea (often called a **central idea**).

The central idea of a longer text is typically stated in a **thesis statement**.