

# Implied Main Ideas

- An **implied main idea** is only suggested; it is not clearly stated in one sentence.
- To figure out an implied main idea, we must look at the supporting details.

# IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS

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"Kenny hasn't spoken to me for two months, he won't return my calls, and he's been seeing one of my friends. Do you think I should break up with him?"

In this cartoon, you can figure out the main idea by noting the details: the speaker's boyfriend hasn't spoken to her in two months, won't return her calls, and is dating one of her friends. The clearly implied idea is that *he* has already broken up with *her*.

## IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

To find the main idea when it is not directly stated, we must ask the same questions we've already used to find main ideas:

- Who or what is the paragraph about?  
(What is the **topic**?)
- What is the **main point** the author is trying to make about the topic?

When we think we know the main point, we can test it by asking this question:

- Does *all or most* of the material in the paragraph support this idea?

# IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

Read the paragraph below. Then answer the question.

Slashing their swords wildly, swordfish swim through schools of fish, trying to slice as many as possible; then they feast. When hooked by fishermen, they have been known to fight nonstop for three or four hours. They have pulled some fishermen to their deaths, and if they are not clubbed senseless when captured, they will slash fishermen on deck. A puncture wound by a swordfish bill means a severe and nearly instantaneous infection. Their sword, which is a bony extension of the upper jaw, is deadly sharp on the sides and can grow to a length of four or five feet. It is a weapon backed up by five hundred pounds of sleek, muscular fish. Swordfish have even been known to attack boats, driving their swords right through the hull and at times sinking them.

The topic of the paragraph is "swordfish." Choose the point the author is trying to make about swordfish.

- A.** Swordfish will attack entire schools of fish.
- B.** Swordfish will fight for hours when hooked and have even pulled some fishermen to their deaths.
- C.** A swordfish bill can cause severe infections and even sink a boat.
- D.** Swordfish are aggressive, dangerous fish.

# IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

Read the paragraph below. Then answer the question.

All writers get bogged down now and then. Accept the fact that sooner or later writer's block will happen to you. When it does, one response is to try to write something—no matter how awkward or imprecise it may seem. Just jot a reminder to yourself in the margin ("Fix this," "Redo," or "Ugh!") to fine-tune the section later. Another way to deal with a writing snag is leave a blank space—a spot for the right words when they finally come to mind at a later time. Then move on to an easier section, see if you can write that, and then return to the challenging part. It may also help to reread to yourself or out loud what you've already written. Regaining a sense of the large context may be enough to overcome writer's block. You might also try talking your way through a troublesome section. Like most people, you probably speak more easily than you write; by speaking aloud, you tap this oral fluency and put it to work in your writing.

What is the topic of the paragraph?

- A.** Writer's block
- B.** Writing and talking
- C.** The writing process
- D.** Rereading your writing



# IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

Which statement best expresses the main idea of the paragraph?

All writers get bogged down now and then. Accept the fact that sooner or later writer's block will happen to you. When it does, one response is to try to write something—no matter how awkward or imprecise it may seem. Just jot a reminder to yourself in the margin ("Fix this," "Redo," or "Ugh!") to fine-tune the section later. Another way to deal with a writing snag is leave a blank space—a spot for the right words when they finally come to mind at a later time. Then move on to an easier section, see if you can write that, and then return to the challenging part. It may also help to reread to yourself or out loud what you've already written. Regaining a sense of the large context may be enough to overcome writer's block. You might also try talking your way through a troublesome section. Like most people, you probably speak more easily than you write; by speaking aloud, you tap this oral fluency and put it to work in your writing.

- A.** Writing is not easy.
- B.** There are various ways to deal with writer's block.
- C.** Talking about what you are trying to write may help you break out of a writing snag.
- D.** Write easier sections of the paper first and come back later to a harder section.

## IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

- When you read, you often have to **infer** — figure out on your own—the author's unstated main idea.
- The implied main idea you come up with should cover **all or most of the details** in the paragraph.

# IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

Hints for identifying the topic and main idea:

- Remember to look for **repeated words**.
- Mark **major supporting details**. Major details are often signaled by **addition words**.

## *Addition Words*

one  
first (of all)  
second(ly)  
third(ly)

to begin with  
for one thing  
other  
another

also  
in addition  
next  
moreover

further  
furthermore  
last (of all)  
final(ly)



## IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

Read the paragraph below. Then answer the question.

Nonverbal messages are more emotionally powerful than verbal ones. Nonverbal behaviors tell people about our emotional state. When we want to convey how we feel about someone, language often fails us. Nonverbal messages are also more universal than verbal ones. Members of different linguistic groups must spend a lot of time and effort to learn each other's verbal codes, but they can communicate instantly by smiling or wrinkling their faces in disgust. Some researchers have shown a number of emotions to be expressed in the same way by members of different cultural groups. Last, nonverbal messages are more continuous and natural than spoken language. Because gestures and body movements flow into one another without obvious beginnings and endings, they seem to be a more natural part of our existence than words.

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

## IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS IN PARAGRAPHS

Read the paragraph again. Then answer the question.

Nonverbal messages are more emotionally powerful than verbal ones. Nonverbal behaviors tell people about our emotional state. When we want to convey how we feel about someone, language often fails us. Nonverbal messages are also more universal than verbal ones. Members of different linguistic groups must spend a lot of time and effort to learn each other's verbal codes, but they can communicate instantly by smiling or wrinkling their faces in disgust. Some researchers have shown a number of emotions to be expressed in the same way by members of different cultural groups. Last, nonverbal messages are more continuous and natural than spoken language. Because gestures and body movements flow into one another without obvious beginnings and endings, they seem to be a more natural part of our existence than words.

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

## IMPLIED CENTRAL IDEAS IN LONGER PASSAGES

- As you learned in Chapter 2, the central idea in a longer passage is also called the **central point** or **thesis**.
- Often, authors of essays and textbook selections will state their **central points or ideas** in much the same ways as they state them in a single paragraph.

## IMPLIED CENTRAL IDEAS IN LONGER PASSAGES

- Occasionally, the central point will be **implied** rather than stated directly.
- You can find the central point of a longer selection the same way you find the main idea in a paragraph—by **looking for the topic** and by **considering the supporting material**.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter, you learned the following:

- At times authors imply, or suggest, a main idea without stating it clearly in one sentence. In such cases, you must figure out that main idea by considering the supporting details.
- To find implied central points in longer reading selections, you must again look closely at the supporting material.



# Inferences

- Many important ideas in reading are not stated directly.
- Discovering these ideas is called **making inferences** or **drawing conclusions**.

# INFERENCES

Which **inference** is more logically based on the information in this cartoon?

- A.** The man was probably working on a home improvement or repair project.
- B.** The man deliberately ruined the woman's pan.



# INFERENCES

Which **inference** is more logically based on the information in this cartoon?

**A.** The man was probably working on a home improvement or repair project.

Since the man was using a kitchen pan as a hammer, he must have been somewhere where there is a kitchen—probably his and the woman's home.

**B.** The man deliberately ruined the woman's pan.

The man's explanation—he couldn't find his hammer—suggests that he simply needed something to hammer with. Nothing suggests that he intentionally ruined the pan.



# INFERENCES

Which **inference** is more logically based on the information in this cartoon?

- C.** The woman is upset that the man has used her pan as a hammer.
- D.** The man realizes that the woman is angry at him for using her good pan as a hammer.





# INFERENCES

Which **inference** is more logically based on the information in this cartoon?

**C.** The woman is upset that the man has used her pan as a hammer.

The woman's final comment strongly suggests that she is angry and needs to let out her anger, quite possibly by hammering the person who ruined her pan.

**D.** The man realizes that the woman is angry at him for using her good pan as a hammer.

Nothing in the man's body language or words indicates that he realizes the woman is angry with him.





# INFERENCES IN READING

Which **inference** is more firmly based on the information in the passage?

Jim Johnson panicked when he came home from work to find his neighbor's pet rabbit dead and in the jaws of his German shepherd, Fido. Johnson took the filthy, slightly chewed-up bunny into his house, washed it with care, and then used the blow dryer to restore its fur as best he could. A short time later he secretly put the rabbit back into its outdoor cage.

The next day, Jim's neighbor stopped him as they were both doing yard work. "Did you hear that Thumper died?"

"Uh, no," stammered Johnson.

"We went out a couple days ago and found him dead. What's really weird, though, is that the day after we buried him, we went outside and discovered that someone had dug him up, given him a bath, styled his fur, and put him back into his cage!"

- A.** Johnson's neighbor had children who took care of the rabbit.
- B.** Fido had probably dug up the rabbit's grave.

# INFERENCES IN READING

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- C.** The neighbor was convinced that Johnson had dug up the rabbit.
- D.** Jim Johnson assumed his dog had killed the rabbit.
- E.** The rabbit had been very sick.

# INFERENCES IN READING

Which **inference** is more firmly based on the information in the passage?

Early one morning, a man was walking along a sandy, deserted beach. At least he thought it was deserted. As he gazed ahead of him, he noticed that there was another human figure in sight. It was a boy who kept bending down, picking something up, and throwing it into the sea. He repeated the movement again and again and again.

As the man drew near, he saw that the sand surrounding the boy was covered with starfish that had been washed in by the waves. It was these stranded starfish that the boy was throwing into the water.

“Why are you doing that?” the man asked.

Not pausing, the boy replied, “The tide is going out, and the sun is rising. Soon the heat will be too much for the starfish, and they will die.”

The man shook his head tolerantly. “My dear boy,” he said. “There are miles of beach and hundreds, maybe thousands of starfish. You can’t save them all. What you’re doing can’t make a difference!”

The boy listened politely, then picked up the next starfish and threw it in the water. “It makes a difference for this one,” he answered.

- A.** The boy knows he cannot save all the starfish.
- B.** The man believes the boy’s efforts are admirable.



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The boy listened politely, then picked up the next starfish and threw it in the water. "It makes a difference for this one," he answered.

**A. The boy knows he cannot save all the starfish.**

The boy doesn't show any surprise when the man tells him he can't save all the starfish. Also, the boy's obvious understanding of the shore cycles makes it clear he knows how few starfish he could save. He indicates he still wants to save the ones he can.

**B. The man believes the boy's efforts are admirable.**

The man is "tolerant" of what the boy is doing, but he suggests the boy's actions are pointless.

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The boy listened politely, then picked up the next starfish and threw it in the water. “It makes a difference for this one,” he answered.

**C.** The man decides to help save some of the stranded starfish.

**D.** The boy believes that a little help is better than nothing.



# INFERENCES IN READING

## Guidelines for Making Inferences in Reading

- 1 Never lose sight of **available information**.

As much as possible, base your inferences on facts.

- 2 Use your **background information** and **experience** to help you in making inferences.

The more you know about a subject, the better your inferences are likely to be.

- 3 Consider the **alternatives**.

Don't simply accept the first inference that comes to mind.

# INFERENCES IN LITERATURE

Inferences are very important in **reading literature**.

A nonfiction writer might write:

The little boy was in a stubborn mood.

The novelist might write:

When Todd's mother asked him to stop playing in the yard and come indoors, he didn't even look up but shouted "No!" and then spelled it out, "N...O!"

- Writers of **factual** material **directly state** much of what they mean.
- Writers of **fiction** **show** what they mean.

# INFERENCES IN LITERATURE

Poetry, especially, by its nature, implies much of its meaning. For example, read the following poem by Carl Sandburg.

The fog comes  
on little cat feet.

It sits looking  
over harbor and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.

Here, Sandburg uses a figure of speech known as a **metaphor**, comparing fog to a cat that makes a sudden, silent, almost mysterious appearance.

# INFERENCES IN LITERATURE

## A Note on Figures of Speech

- Creative writers often use comparisons known as **figures of speech** to imply their meanings.
- The two most common figures of speech are **similes** and **metaphors**.

# INFERENCES IN LITERATURE

## A Note on Figures of Speech

**Simile** — a stated comparison, introduced with *like*, *as*, or *as if*.

The man says that because the boss chewed him out, he felt "like a piece of old bubble gum." The **simile** clearly shows that the man's feelings have been hurt.





# INFERENCES IN LITERATURE

## A Note on Figures of Speech

### *Other Examples of Similes*

- Many of the players on the football team have arms *as big as tree trunks*.
- After I lost my job, my material possessions soon disappeared *like so much dandelion fluff in a wind*.
- When my new boyfriend arrived, my parents stared at him *as if he were a cockroach who had just come under the door*.

# INFERENCES IN LITERATURE

## A Note on Figures of Speech

**Metaphor**—an implied comparison, with *like*, *as*, or *as if* omitted.



In this cartoon, the boy, Linus, is using a **metaphor** when he says that big sisters are "the crab grass in the lawn of life." He means that big sisters spoil things and are a nuisance.

# INFERENCES IN LITERATURE

## A Note on Figures of Speech

### *Other Examples of Metaphors*

- From the airplane, I looked down on Manhattan, *an anthill of frantic life*.
- Our boss is always a *bear* on Monday morning.
- My aunt's home was a *pack-rat's nest* of everything she had collected during her life.

## INFERENCES IN TABLES AND GRAPHS

- Just as pictures and reading material require inferences, so do **tables** and **graphs**.
- To infer the ideas presented in tables and graphs, you must **consider all the information presented**.



# INFERENCES IN TABLES AND GRAPHS

## Steps in Reading a Table or Graph

### 1 Read the title.

What is the **title** of the table below?

#### The Bingeing Phenomenon

Many college students drink heavily;  
shown below is the percentage of students in each category who binge.

Age	
Under 21	45%
21-23	48
24+	28
College residences	
Fraternity/sorority	84%
Coed dorm	52
Off-campus housing	40
Single-sex dorm	38

Race	
White	48%
Hispanic	33
Nat.Amer./Nat. Alask.	34
Asian/Pacific islander	21
African American	16
Gender	
Male	50%
Female	39

Participation in Sports	
Nonparticipant	36%
Participant	54
Team leader	58
Attitude	
Frequent bingers who think they drink lightly/moderately	
Male	91%
Female	38

# INFERENCES IN TABLES AND GRAPHS

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What is the **title** of the table below? *The Bingeing Phenomenon*

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SOURCES: Harvard School of Public Health, *Journal of American College Health*

# INFERENCES IN TABLES AND GRAPHS

## Steps in Reading a Table or Graph

### 2 Check the source.

What are the **sources** for the table below?

**SOURCES:** Harvard School of Public Health, *Journal of American College Health*

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# INFERENCES IN TABLES AND GRAPHS

## Steps in Reading a Table or Graph

- 3** Read any captions at the top, the side, or underneath that tell exactly what each column, line, bar, number, or other item represents.

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# INFERENCES IN TABLES AND GRAPHS

Which **inference** is more logically based on the table?

- A.** The older students get, the more they tend to binge.
- B.** In general, students who live in fraternities or sororities drink more heavily than students who live elsewhere.

## The Bingeing Phenomenon

Many college students drink heavily;  
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# INFERENCES IN TABLES AND GRAPHS

Which **inference** is more logically based on the table?

**A.** The older students get, the more they tend to binge.

The "Age" section of the table indicates that once students become 24 or older, their bingeing decreases from 48% to 28%.

**B.** In general, students who live in fraternities or sororities drink more heavily than students who live elsewhere.

The "College residences" section of the table tells us that fraternity and sorority members do drink more heavily than the other three groups.

## The Bingeing Phenomenon

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Which **inference** is more logically based on the table?

**C.** Bingeing is not popular among college athletes.

**D.** Most college students who binge are unaware of the true extent of their drinking.

## The Bingeing Phenomenon

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## **CHAPTER REVIEW**

In this chapter, you learned the following:

- Many important ideas in reading are not stated directly but must be inferred. To make inferences about implied ideas, use the information provided as well as your own experience and logic.
- Inferences are also a key part of reading literature and such visual material as cartoons, tables, and graphs.