

Main Ideas

Recognizing the **main idea**, or **point**, is the most important key to good comprehension.

WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA?

To find the main idea, or point, in a reading selection, ask yourself:

“What is the main point the author is trying to make?”

WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA?



The **main idea**, or **point**, in this cartoon—that the man on the couch has problems—is well supported by the statements about his job, wife, friends, and dog.

WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA?

Read this paragraph, asking yourself, "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.

Which general statement is supported by the other material in 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.

WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA?

Explanation

- A — The paragraph does not support the idea that TV violence is harmless. Sentence A introduces the topic of TV violence.
- B — This is a general statement. The rest of the passage goes on to describe three negative ways that TV violence affects people.
- C — This sentence is about only one study. It is not general enough to include the other studies cited in the paragraph.
- D — This sentence provides detailed evidence for the first supporting idea. It does not cover the rest of the paragraph.

Which general statement is supported by the other material in 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.

WHAT IS THE MAIN IDEA?

The Main Idea as an "Umbrella" Idea



- The main idea is the author's **general point**.
- The other material of the paragraph **fits under the general point**.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

- To recognize the main idea of a passage, you must **think as you read**.
- 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.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

1 Look for General versus Specific Ideas

In the list of words below, which three items are **specific ideas**, and which item is the **general idea**?

- A. dishonesty
- B. greed
- C. bad qualities
- D. selfishness

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

1 Look for General versus Specific Ideas

Specific ⇒ **A.** dishonesty

Specific ⇒ **B.** greed

General ⇒ **C.** bad qualities

Specific ⇒ **D.** selfishness

Explanation

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

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

1 Look for General versus Specific Ideas

Look again at the paragraph on TV violence. Notice that the *general idea* is supported by *specific ideas*.

Many people feel that violence on television is harmless entertainment. However, we now know that **TV violence does affect people in negative ways.** [↩ **general idea**] One study showed that **frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others.** [↩ **specific idea**] 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.** [↩ **specific idea**] 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.** [↩ **specific idea**] 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.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

2 Use the Topic to Lead You to the Main Idea

- The **topic** is the general subject of a reading selection.
- Knowing the **topic** can help you find the writer's **main point** about that topic.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

2 Use the Topic to Lead You to the Main Idea

- To find the topic of a selection, ask yourself:
Who or what is the selection **about**?
- After you find the topic, ask yourself:
What **main point** is the author making about the topic?

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

2 Use the Topic to Lead You to the Main Idea

Recently a family of four were found dead in their 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.

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

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

2 Use the Topic to Lead You to the Main Idea

Recently a family of four were found dead in their 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.

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

Carbon monoxide

Explanation

Everything in the paragraph is about the topic of carbon monoxide. Notice how many times the term is used in the passage.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

2 Use the Topic to Lead You to the Main Idea

Recently a family of four were found dead in their 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.

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

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

2 Use the Topic to Lead You to the Main Idea

Recently a family of four were found dead in their 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.

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

Carbon monoxide is deadly for many reasons.

Explanation

The third sentence states a general idea that sums up what the entire paragraph is about. It is an “umbrella” statement under which all the other material in the paragraph fits.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

2 Use the Topic to Lead You to the Main Idea

Recently a family of four were found dead in their suburban home in New Jersey—victims of carbon monoxide. Such cases are tragically common. **Carbon monoxide is deadly for many reasons.** [↔ **topic sentence**] 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.

The sentence that states the main idea is known as the **main idea sentence** or the **topic sentence**.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

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

- Sometimes an author announces the main idea by using **key words**.
- One group of key words is **list words**.
List words tell you that a **list of items** will follow.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

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

The main idea in the paragraph about carbon monoxide was stated like this:

Carbon monoxide is deadly for *many reasons*.

The expression *many reasons* suggests that the paragraph may be about specific reasons that carbon monoxide is deadly. The **list words** *many reasons* help you identify the main idea.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

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

Here are some common words that often announce a main idea:

List Words

several kinds (or ways) of
three advantages of
various reasons for

several causes of
five steps
a number of effects

some factors in
among the results
a series of

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

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

Here are some common words that often announce a main idea:

List Words

several kinds^s (or ways^s) of
three advantages^s of
various reasons^s for

several causes^s of
five steps^s
a number of effects^s

some factors^s in
among the results^s
a series^s of

Notice that each has a word that ends in **s**. The plural suggests that the supporting details will be a list of items.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

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

- Another type of key word is the **addition word**.
- It is generally used right before a supporting detail.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

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

Here are some common words that often introduce supporting details and help you discover the main idea:

Addition Words

one	to begin with	also	further
first (of all)	for one thing	in addition	furthermore
second(ly)	other	next	last (of all)
third(ly)	another	moreover	final(ly)

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

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

Reread the paragraph about TV violence. As you do, pick out the **addition words** that alert you to supporting details. Also note the **list words** that suggest the main idea.

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.

RECOGNIZING A MAIN IDEA

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

Each new supporting detail is introduced by an **addition word** or words. The **list words** *negative ways* suggest the supporting details will be a list of negative ways TV violence affects people.

Many people feel that violence on television is harmless entertainment. However, we now know that TV violence does affect people in **negative ways** [↔ **list words**]. [addition word ⇒] 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. [addition words ⇒] 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. [addition word ⇒] 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.

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea at the Beginning

Main Idea
Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail

or

Introductory Detail
Main Idea
Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail

In textbooks, the **main idea** is often stated **in the first or second sentence** of the paragraph. The rest of the paragraph then supports the main idea with details.

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea at the Beginning

As you read the paragraph below, look for the **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, actually forced to talk with another early arrival. If they arrive late, all eyes will be upon them. Before heading to class, the shy student 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.

Which sentence contains the main idea?

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea at the Beginning

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, actually forced to talk with another early arrival. If they arrive late, all eyes will be upon them. Before heading to class, the shy student 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

The first sentence introduces the topic: shy people in class. The second sentence contains the main idea. The remaining sentences support the main idea with examples of pain causing aggression.

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea in the Middle

Introductory Detail
Introductory Detail

Main Idea

Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail

Sometimes the **main idea** appears in the middle of the paragraph.

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea in the Middle

As you read the paragraph below, look for the **main idea**.

A television ad for a new sports car showed scenes of beautiful open country that suggested freedom and adventure. The car never appeared in the ad at all. An ad for a hotel chain showed a romantic couple in bed together. They were obviously on vacation and having a leisurely, romantic, ~~happy~~ morning. 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. 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. Similarly, details on the hotel's prices and service would be more informative than images of a glamorous vacation. But the romantic couple gets people's attention and associates the hotel in the viewers' minds with a good time.

Which sentence contains the main idea?

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea in the Middle

A television ad for a new sports car showed scenes of beautiful open country that suggested freedom and adventure. The car never appeared in the ad at all. An ad for a hotel chain showed a romantic couple in bed together. They were obviously on vacation and having a leisurely, romantic, ~~happy~~ morning. **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.** 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. Similarly, details on the hotel's prices and service would be more informative than images of a glamorous vacation. But the romantic couple gets people's attention and associates the hotel in the viewers' minds with a good time.

The first four sentences introduce the topic of advertisers and provide specific examples of the main idea. The fifth sentence contains the main idea. The rest of the paragraph further develops the main idea.

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea at the End

Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail
Supporting Detail

Main Idea

Sometimes all of the sentences in the paragraph will lead up to the **main idea**, which is presented **at the end**.

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea at the End

As you read the paragraph below, look for the **main idea**.

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.

Which sentence contains the main idea?

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

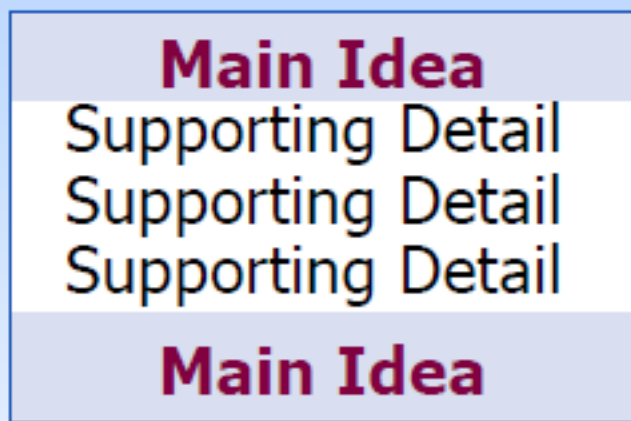
Main Idea at the End

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.**

The first three sentences provide details about destructive insects. The next five sentences provide details about beneficial insects. The last sentence states the main idea, that insects are both harmful and beneficial.

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea at the Beginning and the End



Sometimes an author will state the **main idea** **near the beginning** of the paragraph and then emphasize it by **restating it later** in the paragraph.

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea at the Beginning and the End

Read the paragraph and look for the **two main idea sentences**.

An important result of medical advances is an increase in the number of conditions thought to be of medical concern. In the not-to-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 ingrown toenails, 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.

Which two sentences contain the main idea?

LOCATIONS OF THE MAIN IDEA

Main Idea at the Beginning and the End

An important result of medical advances is an increase in the number of conditions thought to be of medical concern. In the not-to-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,~~ ^{signs of aging,} 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.

The main idea—because of medical advances, more problems are considered medical issues—is expressed in different words in the first and last sentences.

MAIN IDEAS

The Central Point

- Just as a paragraph may have a main idea, a longer selection may have a **central point**.
- The central point in a longer selection is also known as a **central idea** or **thesis**.
- You can find a central point in the same way you find a main idea—by identifying the topic and then looking for the supporting material.

MAIN IDEAS

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.

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 under which fits all the specific supporting material of the passage.
- 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 the paragraph.

Supporting Details

Supporting details are reasons, examples, facts, steps, or other kinds of evidence that explain a main idea.

WHAT ARE SUPPORTING DETAILS?



In this cartoon, the **main idea** is: "I know why I don't lose weight. The **supporting details** are: big meals, snacks, beer, and not exercising. The joke is that these supporting details may make him *happy*, but they don't make him *healthy*."

WHAT ARE SUPPORTING DETAILS?

“A penny saved is a penny earned,” the old saying goes. But there are now good reasons for our government to phase the penny out of our economy, allowing the nickel to stand as the lowest-valued coin. For one thing, pennies take up more space than they are worth. We can all recall the time when we needed a nickel, dime, or quarter to make an important phone call, buy a vending machine snack, or make a photocopy, and all we could come up with was a fistful of useless pennies. Pennies are also a nuisance to the business community. According to the National Association of Convenience Stores, 5.5 million hours and 22 million dollars are wasted by businesses on the extra time and effort it takes to handle pennies. Finally, keeping pennies in circulation costs the nation as a whole. The manufacturing, storage, and handling expenses involved in a penny’s production and distribution add up to considerably more than the one cent it is worth.

What are the three major details that should be added to complete the basic outline of the paragraph?

Main idea: Our government should phase the penny out of the economy.

Supporting detail: 1.

Supporting detail: 2.

Supporting detail: 3.

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Outlining

Outlines begin with the main idea, followed by supporting details.

- **Major details** explain and develop the main idea.
- **Minor details** help fill out the major details and make them clear.

Outlining is a useful **note-taking strategy**.

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Outlining

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.

Above is part of the paragraph from Chapter 2 on TV violence.

Reread it and pick out the **two major supporting details**.

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Outlining

Outlining Tips

Tip 1 Look for words that tell you a **list of details** is coming.

List Words

several kinds of

various causes

a few reasons

a number of

a series of

three factors

four steps

among the results

several advantages

Examples

- But there are now **good reasons** for our government to phase the penny out of the economy.
- In fact, we now know that TV violence does affect people in **negative ways**.

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Outlining

Outlining Tips

Tip 2 Look for words that signal major details. Such words are called **addition words**.

Addition Words

one	to begin with	also	further
first (of all)	for one thing	in addition	furthermore
second(ly)	other	next	last (of all)
third(ly)	another	moreover	final(ly)

Examples

Many people feel that violence on television is harmless entertainment. However, we now know that TV violence does affect people in **negative ways** [↔**list words**].

[**addition word**↔] **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. [**addition words** ↔] **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.

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Outlining

Outlining Tips

Tip 3 In your outline, put all supporting details of equal importance at the same distance from the margin.

Example

Main idea

1. Major detail

- a. Minor detail
- b. Minor detail

2. Major detail

- a. Minor detail
- b. Minor detail
- c. Minor detail

3. Major detail

- a. Minor detail
- b. Minor detail

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Mapping

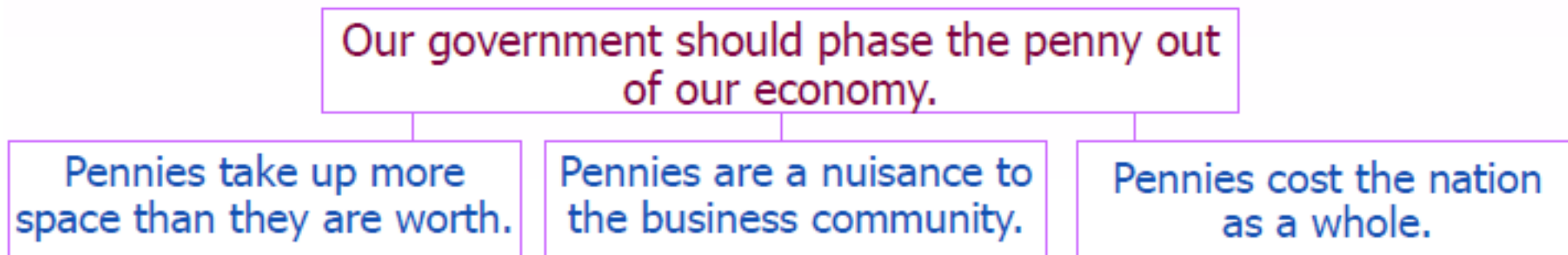
Maps, or diagrams, are visual outlines in which **circles**, **boxes**, or other **shapes** show the **relationship** between main ideas and supporting details.

Mapping, like outlining, is a useful **note-taking strategy**.

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Mapping

Below is a map of the paragraph on phasing out the penny.

“A penny saved is a penny earned,” the old saying goes. But there are now good reasons for our government to phase the penny out of our economy, allowing the nickel to stand as the lowest-valued coin. [↩main idea] For one thing, pennies take up more space than they are worth. [↩supporting detail] We can all recall the time when we needed a nickel, dime, or quarter to make an important phone call, buy a vending machine snack, or make a photocopy, and all we could come up with was a fistful of useless pennies. Pennies are also a nuisance to the business community. [↩supporting detail] According to the National Association of Convenience Stores, 5.5 million hours and 22 million dollars are wasted by businesses on the extra time and effort it takes to handle pennies. Finally, keeping pennies in circulation costs the nation as a whole. [↩supporting detail] The manufacturing, storage, and handling expenses involved in a penny’s production and distribution add up to considerably more than the one cent it is worth.



SUPPORTING DETAILS: Mapping

Read the following paragraph. Notice the list words and the addition words that signal the three major details.

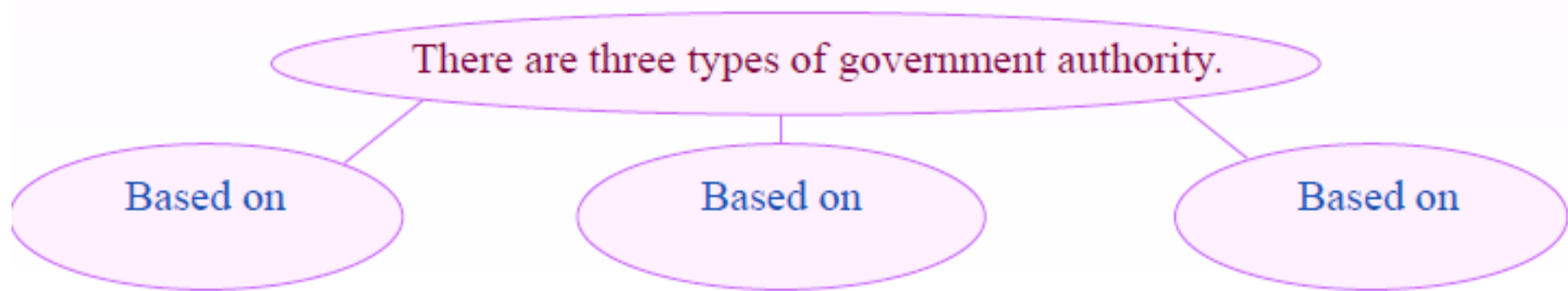
Weber says that there are three types of authority from which governments gain their right to command. One type of authority is based on tradition. Kings, queens, feudal lords, and tribal chiefs do not need written rules in order to govern. Their authority is based on long-standing customs and is handed down through generations from parent to child. People may also submit to authority because of charisma, the exceptional personal quality of an individual. Such leaders as Napoleon and Gandhi illustrate authority that derives its legitimacy from charismatic personalities. The political systems of industrial states are based largely on a third type of authority: legal authority. These systems derive legitimacy from a set of explicit rules and procedures that spell out the ruler's rights and duties. Typically, the rules and procedures are put in writing. The people grant their obedience to "the law." It specifies procedures by which certain individuals hold offices of power, such as governor or president or prime minister. But the authority is vested in those offices, not in the individuals who temporarily hold the offices.

1. What words in the first sentence tell you that a **list of details** is coming?
2. What word signals the **first** major detail?
3. What word signals the **second** major detail?
4. What word signals the **third** major detail?

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Mapping

What major detail should be added to the map below?

Weber says that there are **three types** of authority from which governments gain their right to command. **One** type of authority is based on tradition. Kings, queens, feudal lords, and tribal chiefs do not need written rules in order to govern. Their authority is based on long-standing customs and is handed down through generations from parent to child. People may **also** submit to authority because of charisma, the exceptional personal quality of an individual. Such leaders as Napoleon and Gandhi illustrate authority that derives its legitimacy from charismatic personalities. The political systems of industrial states are based largely on a **third** type of authority: legal authority. These systems derive legitimacy from a set of explicit rules and procedures that spell out the ruler's rights and duties. Typically, the rules and procedures are put in writing. The people grant their obedience to "the law." It specifies procedures by which certain individuals hold offices of power, such as governor or president or prime minister. But the authority is vested in those offices, not in the individuals who temporarily hold the offices.



SUPPORTING DETAILS: Summarizing

A **summary** is the reduction of a large amount of information to its most important points.

Like outlining and mapping, summarizing is a useful note-taking strategy.

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Summarizing

Read the textbook passage below. Then read the summary that follows it.

People under severe stress may react to their problems with **regression**, a return to childlike behavior and defenses. Adults who cry when their arguments fail may expect those around them to react sympathetically, as their parents did when they were children. Other adults may use temper tantrums in a similar way. In both examples, people are drawing on childish behaviors to solve current problems, in the hope that someone will respond to them the way adults did when they were children. Inappropriate as it may seem, such immature and manipulative behavior often works—at least for a while.

Summary

Regression—a return to childlike behavior and defenses to solve current problems. For example, an adult whose argument fails may cry to get sympathy.

- Notice that the definition is *not* summarized, but the supporting information *is* summarized.

SUPPORTING DETAILS: Summarizing

Read this textbook passage. Then answer the question that follows it.

The tendency for members to be so intent on maintaining group agreement that they overlook or put aside the flaws in their decision is called **groupthink**. Once a tentative decision has been made, members withhold information or opinions that might cast doubt on that course of action. They do not want to be seen as criticizing their colleagues or as “rocking the boat.” If outside experts raise questions about the wisdom of their decision, members unite in opposing and discrediting the new information. The classic example of “groupthink” occurred during President Kennedy’s administration. Kennedy sought the advice of a small group of trusted advisers in deciding whether to support the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961. Although several advisers had strong objections to the plan, not one expressed doubts. As far as Kennedy knew, his advisers were unanimously in favor. The invasion was a military and public relations disaster.

Which example below best completes the study notes?

Groupthink—the tendency for members to be so intent on maintaining group agreement that they overlook or put aside the flaws in their decision.

Example—

- A. During Kennedy’s administration, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 was a military and public relations disaster.
- B. The classic example occurred during President Kennedy’s administration.
- C. Kennedy went ahead with the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion because advisors withheld their objections.

CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter, you learned the following:

- Major and minor details provide the added information you need to make sense of a main idea.
- List words and addition words can help you to find major and minor supporting details.
- Outlining, mapping, and summarizing are useful note-taking strategies.
- Outlines show the relationship between the main idea, major details, and minor details of a passage.
- Maps are very visual outlines.
- Writing a definition and summarizing an example is a good way to take notes on a new term.