

54 Has difficulty identifying the topic sentence and main idea when reading

1. Make certain the student always considers the first sentence of a paragraph as a possible topic sentence and main idea.

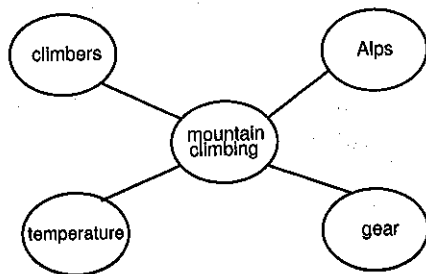
2. Make certain the student understands that a topic sentence or main idea for a paragraph always will contain one or more of the following, which will be the whole idea of the paragraph: *Who, What, Where, When, How.*

3. Make certain the student understands that the topic sentence or main idea can be determined by choosing the one sentence in a paragraph that makes sense when it stands alone (e.g., in the process of elimination, isolate each sentence and decide if it tells what the whole paragraph is about).

4. Have the student write a paragraph about a favorite topic and use a triangle to determine the hierarchy of sentences:

- (1) Most important (topic),
- (2) Most important detail,
- (3) Less important detail, and
- (4) Incidental detail (e.g., could be left out without changing the paragraph meaning).

5. Have the student employ the "satellite system" to identify the main idea of a paragraph. The student should choose the one word or phrase around which the entire paragraph is built. Then the student should name the other details that describe that central figure. This allows the student to focus on the subject in order to spot the main idea.



6. Reinforce the student for identifying the topic sentence and/or main idea: (a) give the student a tangible reward (e.g., classroom privileges, line leading, passing out materials, five minutes free time, etc.) or (b) give the student an intangible reward (e.g., praise, handshake, smile, etc.).

7. Speak to the student to explain: (a) what the student is doing wrong and (b) what the student should be doing.

8. Write a contract with the student specifying what behavior is expected and what reinforcement will be made available when terms of the contract have been met. (See Appendix for Behavioral Contract.)

9. Have the student question any directions, explanations, and instructions not understood.

10. Communicate with parents (e.g., notes home, phone calls, etc.) in order to share information concerning the student's progress and so that they can reinforce the student at home.

11. Evaluate the appropriateness of the task to determine: (a) if the task is too difficult and (b) if the length of time scheduled to complete the task is appropriate.

12. Identify a peer to act as a model for the student to imitate and also to assist the student with directions, etc.

13. Specify exactly what is to be done for the completion of the task (e.g., indicate definite starting and stopping points, indicate a minimum requirement, etc.).

14. Have the student act as a peer tutor to teach another student a concept he/she has mastered. This can serve as reinforcement for the student.

15. Provide practice in identifying the topic sentence and/or main idea using a computer software program that gives the student immediate feedback.

16. Make certain the student has mastery of reading concepts at each level before introducing a new skill level.

17. Make certain the student is not required to learn more information than he/she is capable of at any one time.

18. Reduce the emphasis on competition. Competitive activities may cause the student to hurry and commit any number of errors.

19. Reduce the amount of information on a page if it is causing visual distractions for the student (e.g., have less print to read, isolate information that is presented to the student).

20. Highlight or underline important information the student reads (e.g., directions, assignments, etc.).

21. Stop at various points during the presentation of information to check the student's comprehension.

22. Give the student time to read a selection more than once, emphasizing comprehension rather than speed.

23. Use reading series materials with high interest (e.g., adventures, romances, mysteries, athletics, etc.) and low vocabulary.

24. Write paragraphs and short stories requiring skills the student is currently developing. These passages should be of high interest to the student using his/her name, family members, friends, pets, and interesting experiences.

25. Make certain that the reading demands of all subjects and assignments are within the ability level of the student. If not, modify or adjust the reading material to the student's ability level. A lower-grade-level text may be an alternative.

26. Reduce the amount of material the student reads at one time (e.g., reduce reading material to single sentences on a page, a single paragraph, etc.). Gradually increase the amount of material as the student experiences success.