

The **main idea** in a paragraph is its most important point. **Details** in the paragraph support the main idea. Identifying the main idea will help you focus on the main message the writer wants to communicate. Use the following strategies to help you identify a paragraph's main idea and supporting details.

- Look for the **main idea**, which is often the first sentence in a paragraph.
- Use the main idea to help you **summarize** the point of the paragraph.
- Identify specific **details**, including facts and examples, that **support** the main idea.

Queen Elizabeth I and the Church of England

Main idea — Under Queen Elizabeth I, who ruled from 1558 to 1603, the Protestant faith again became England's official religion. In 1559, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy. The Act made the queen the sole head of the Church of England. Also, English replaced Latin as the main language of the church, and clergy were allowed to marry. Elizabeth further strengthened the Church of England by personally appointing all but one of the bishops.



MARK IT UP > Read the following paragraph. Circle its main idea. Then underline three of the paragraph's supporting details, numbering each one.

When Elizabeth I inherited the English throne in 1558, she quickly began making changes within the country. Elizabeth reduced the size of the Privy Council to make it more efficient as an advisory body. She also reorganized the large royal household and assembled a group of experienced advisers. Furthermore, England was soon restored to the Protestantism it had known under Henry VIII, Elizabeth's father.

Does the proposed solution to a problem make sense? In order to decide, you need to look at each part of the text. Use the following strategies to read the text below.

- Look at the beginning or middle of a paragraph to find the **statement of the problem**.
- Find **details** that explain the problem and tell why it is important.
- Look for the **proposed solution**.
- Identify the **supporting details** for the proposed solution.
- Think about whether the solution is a good one.

Too Much Noise *by Joan Matson*

It's midnight, and you're trying to sleep. A car alarm goes off outside your window. A street sweeper drives by. Then a neighbor turns on a stereo. If you have ever found yourself in this situation, you are a victim of one of today's most common problems: noise pollution.

Statement of problem

Explanation of problem

According to hearing experts, noise in excess of 85 decibels can cause hearing loss if exposure is long enough. Hair dryers and lawn mowers commonly reach levels of 90 decibels. Noise pollution is not just an annoyance—it can actually be dangerous.

Forming a community antinoise group can be useful in the battle for peace and quiet. Ask neighbors if they share your concerns about noise. Then invite interested people to a meeting. Your group can fight noise by

- researching your community's laws about noise levels.
- printing fliers and making presentations about noise pollution.
- setting a good example instead of adding to the volume.

MARK IT UP Read the text above. Then answer these questions.

1. Underline the proposed solution.
2. Circle at least one detail that supports the need for a solution.
3. Do you think the solution is a good one? Explain why or why not. _____

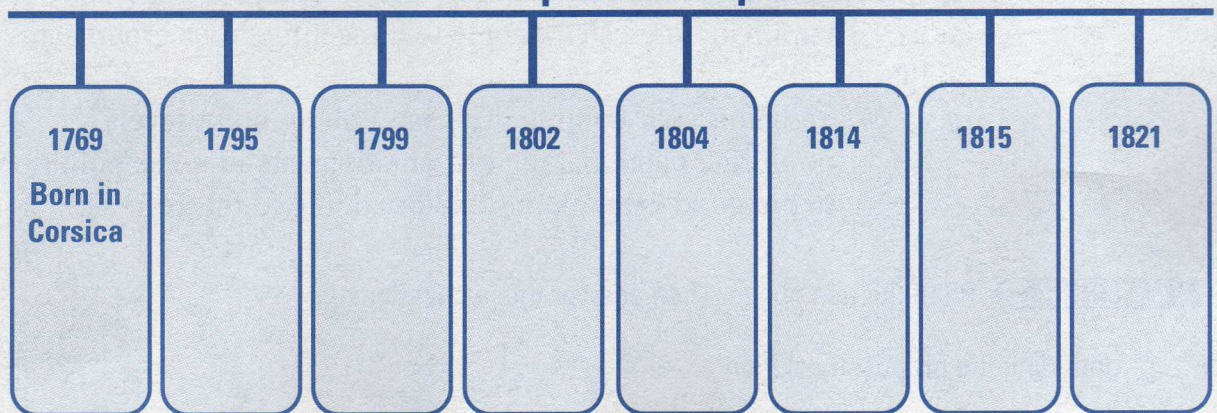
It's important to understand the *sequence*, or order of events, in what you read. It helps you know what happens and why. Read the tips below to make sure a sequence is clear to you. Then look at the example on the opposite page.

- Read through the passage and think about what its **main steps**, or stages, are.
- Look for **words and phrases that signal time**: *in a year, three hours earlier, 202 B.C., or later.*
- Look for **words and phrases that signal order**: *first, second, now, after that, or finally.*

MARK IT UP Read the article on the next page, which describes the main events of Napoleon Bonaparte's career. Use the information from the article and the tips above to answer the questions.

1. Circle words or phrases that signal time.
2. Underline the phrases in the article that signal order.
3. A time line can help you understand a sequence of events. Use the information from the article to complete this time line.

Life of Napoleon Bonaparte



Napoleon's Accomplishments

Napoleon Bonaparte was born in 1769 on the Mediterranean island of Corsica. As a boy, he was sent to boarding school in France. At 16, he joined the French army and began his military career.

After becoming a soldier, Napoleon was gradually assigned more important duties, including the defense of a revolutionary convention in 1795 against royalist rebels. After many military successes, Napoleon was given control of the military on November 9, 1799. The next day, he drove out members of the legislature and seized power. By 1802, after failing to defeat Napoleon, Britain, Austria, and Russia signed a peace agreement with France. For the first time in 10 years, Europe was at peace.

Next, Napoleon began to restore order to France. He set up an efficient tax collecting system, established a national bank, introduced a code of law, and reduced government corruption. In 1804, he crowned himself emperor.

Napoleon controlled the largest European empire since the time of the Romans. However, unlike the Roman Empire, Napoleon's empire lasted only 10 years. His failed attempt to invade Russia in 1812 weakened the French

military. His enemies were quick to take advantage of this weakness. By March 1814, the Russian czar and the Prussian king were leading their troops through Paris.

In April 1814, Napoleon gave up his throne and was exiled to the island of Elba. After an escape from Elba and a brief return to power in 1815, he was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo on June 15, 1815. Napoleon was again banished, this time to the island of St. Helena, in the South Atlantic. He died in 1821.

Historians recognize Napoleon as a military genius. However, his most lasting accomplishments were his law code and other reforms.



A **cause** is an event that brings about another event. An **effect** is something that happens as a result of the first event. Identifying causes and effects helps you understand how events are related. The tips below can help you find causes and effects in any reading.

- Look for an action or event that answers the question "What happened?" This is the **effect**.
- Look for an action or event that answers the question "Why did it happen?" This is the **cause**.
- Identify words or phrases that **signal** causes and effects, such as *because, as a result, therefore, thus, consequently, since, and led to*.

MARK IT UP

Read the cause-and-effect passage on the next page. Then answer the following questions. Notice that the first cause and effect in the passage are labeled.

1. Circle words in the passage that signal causes and effects. The first one is done for you.
2. What causes fish to become concentrated in small pools of water? Underline the cause.
3. Sometimes an effect has more than one cause. Use information from the article to complete the following diagram.

Cause:

Cause:

Cause:

Effect: *The American wood stork is disappearing from the Florida swamps.*

Why Are Wood Storks Leaving Florida?

Effect

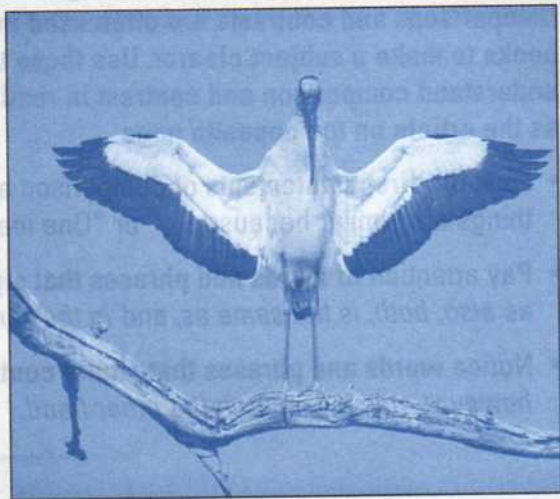
The endangered American wood stork is disappearing from its native Florida swamps, changing the delicate ecological balance in southern Florida wildlife sanctuaries. Researchers have found that the storks have been migrating north to Georgia and South Carolina during mating season. Commercial development of swamplands, changes in weather conditions, and varying water levels have all contributed to the storks' migration.

Since 1900, Florida swamplands have been drained to make room for homes, farms, golf courses, and roads. As a result, the wood storks and other wildlife that lived in the swamps have had to find other places to feed.

Cause

Signal word

Drought is also a cause of the wood storks' migration. Wood storks prefer somewhat dry weather because fish become concentrated in small pools of water and are easy to find. Too much drought, however, brings water down to a level where even wood storks have to fly elsewhere for food. Dry spells also often force the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to drain swamps to provide running water for Floridians. This process continues the destruction of



swamps, including protected areas such as the Everglades.

Unusually wet weather can also be a reason for wood stork migration. Water is pumped into the Everglades during wet years to keep cities and farms safe and dry. High water levels cause fish and other food sources to spread out. Consequently, birds must fly long distances for food.

Flying north is not a perfect solution for the wood stork because it puts storks and their young in danger of cold spells. Luckily, plans to restore the Florida swamps and better manage swamp water are being developed. If these plans succeed, the wood stork might return to nest in Florida. John Ogden, a biologist from the South Florida water management district, has this message for northern states: "We're going to get those South Carolina and Georgia wood storks back!"

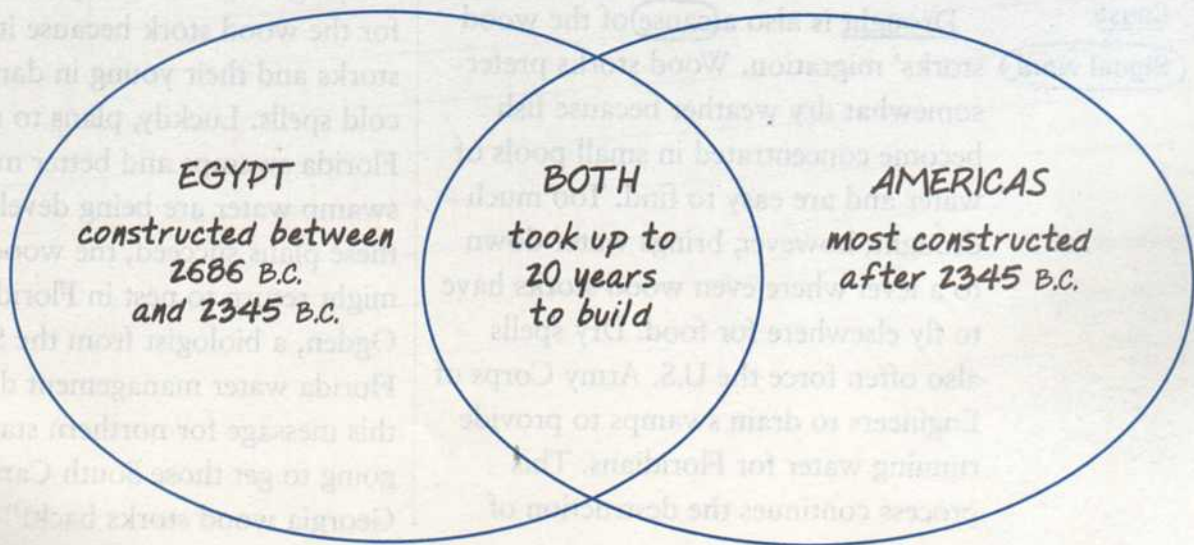
Comparison and Contrast

Comparing two things means showing how they are the same. **Contrasting** two things means showing how they are different. Comparisons and contrasts are often used in science and history books to make a subject clearer. Use these tips to help you understand comparison and contrast in reading assignments, such as the article on the opposite page.

- Look for **direct statements** of comparison and contrast: "These things are similar because . . ." or "One major difference is . . ."
- Pay attention to **words and phrases that signal comparisons**, such as *also*, *both*, *is the same as*, and *in the same way*.
- Notice **words and phrases that signal contrasts**. Some of these are *however*, *still*, *but*, and *on the other hand*.

MARK IT UP Read the essay on the opposite page. Then use the information from the article and the tips above to answer the questions.

1. Circle the words and phrases that signal comparisons. A sample has been done for you.
2. Underline the words and phrases that signal contrasts. A sample has been done for you.
3. A Venn diagram shows how two subjects are similar and how they are different. Complete this diagram, which uses information from the essay to compare and contrast ancient pyramids in Egypt and the Americas. Add at least one similarity to the middle part of the diagram. Add at least one difference in each outer circle.



Pyramids in Egypt and the Americas

The pyramid is perhaps the most well-known accomplishment of ancient peoples. When most people think of these amazing structures, they think of Egypt. However, Egypt was not the only place where pyramids were built. Pyramids were also constructed in the Americas, mainly in Central and South America.

Most pyramid construction in Egypt took place between 2686 and 2345 B.C. In contrast, most Central and South American pyramids were built much later. So far, only one pyramid of the Americas has been found to be similar in age to those in Egypt. A pyramid in Caral, Peru, has been dated to 2627 B.C.

Both the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán, Mexico, and the Great Pyramid at Giza, Egypt, measure nearly the same at their base. Egyptian pyramids are taller, however. The Great Pyramid originally reached a height of 481 feet, while the tallest pyramid in the Americas is 216 feet high. Even the pyramid at Caral is only one-eighth the height of the Great Pyramid.

Pyramids in Egypt and the Americas have major structural differences as well. Pyramids in the Americas have



The Pyramid of Kukulkán in Mexico

receding steps that resemble the layers of a cake. Egyptian pyramids, on the other hand, have smooth sides that connect in a point at the top.

Egyptian pyramids were always part of a larger collection of buildings, including temples and houses. Similarly, American pyramids were built in the middle of cities. However, pyramids in the Americas typically served as temples and were the sites of human and animal sacrifices. In contrast, all Egyptian pyramids were built to be royal burial chambers.

Modern scientists are still amazed at the size and durability of these structures. Many pyramids took as long as 20 years to build, using millions of stone blocks and thousands of laborers. Pyramids in Egypt and in the Americas were both outstanding accomplishments for the civilizations that created them.

An **argument** is an opinion backed up with reasons and facts. Examining an opinion and the reasons and facts that back it up will help you decide if the opinion makes sense. Look at the argument on the right as you read each of these tips.

- Look for words that **signal an opinion**: *I believe; I think; in my view; they claim, argue, or disagree.*
- Look for reasons, facts, or expert opinions that **support** the argument.
- Ask yourself if the argument and reasons **make sense**.
- Look for overgeneralizations or other **errors in reasoning** that may affect the argument.

MARK IT UP Read the argument on the next page, and then answer the questions below.

1. Circle any words that signal an opinion.
2. Underline the words or phrases that give the writer's opinion.
3. The writer presents both sides of the argument. Fill in the chart below to show the two sides. One reason has been provided for you.

Benefits of Working Part-Time	Disadvantages of Working Part-Time
<p><i>1. Students are able to be responsible for expenses.</i></p>	

Should Students Work?

by David Azarian

Americans tend to assume that working is good for students. In the United States, nearly two-thirds of all high school students hold part-time jobs. But in countries like Sweden and Switzerland, only 10 percent of students work as much as a typical American teen. Evidence is mounting that part-time jobs can hurt students' academic performance.

Students who work up to 15 hours a week usually benefit from having a job. Their paychecks allow them to be responsible for expenses such as clothes and car insurance. They build good work habits by following a work schedule and meeting an employer's expectations. Those who find work related to a field they're interested in can learn whether that industry would be a good fit for them.

However, students who work more than 20 hours a week often find that school is just one more thing competing for their attention. If they work late, they come to school tired and may even fall asleep in class. Working longer hours also limits their participation in



extra-curricular activities.

Other costs of working long hours are less obvious. In 1991, researcher David Stern found that students' grade point averages dropped if they worked more than 15 to 20 hours a week. Those who worked the most were also the most likely to drop out of school. Compared with their classmates, they were 33 percent more likely to use drugs and alcohol. Other studies have confirmed the link between working longer hours and lowered achievement.

Does that mean high school students should stick to their books? I've learned a lot from my part-time jobs, so I think that that position ignores the benefits of work experience. But the experts have a point—high school students should work no more than 20 hours a week.