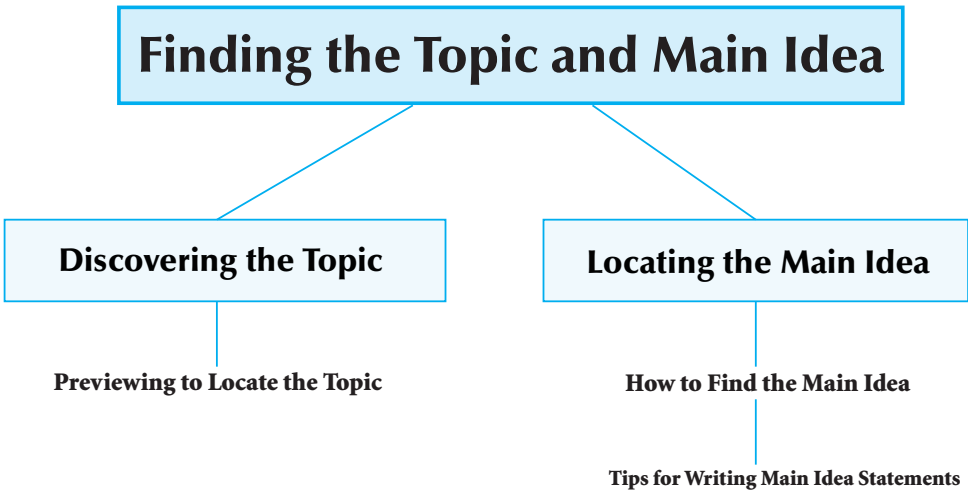
Chapter Three



Before you read something, it is a good idea to determine the topic of what you are about to read. **Topic** is another word for subject; it answers the question "What is the article about?" In most cases, you have to know what the topic is before you can determine the author's main point, because a main point expresses an author's opinion about a topic. Once you identify the topic, you can more easily determine the author's main point, usually referred to as the **main idea**. The models and exercises in this chapter will help you to

- Locate the topic and main idea of an article.
- State the topic and main idea of an article in your own words.

Discovering the Topics

A **topic** can be stated in a single word, such as *tests, dating,* or *boating*. These words are very general. The word *tests*, for example, does not reveal whether an article is about taking tests, creating them, or cheating on them. It does not indicate

whether the author is concerned with essay tests or multiple-choice tests. *Dating* does not, by itself, reveal if the author will discuss dating practices in different cultures or offer hints on how to find the ideal mate. *Boating* provides no clues to the type of boats being discussed or whether the article is for a skilled sailor or a beginner. There is still much to discover about these topics if you want to know what the article is about.

After you read an article it is important to state the topic, and you will find it helpful to make your statement as precise, or specific, as possible. Reading is more useful and pleasurable when you quickly comprehend what you are reading. Identifying the specific topic of your reading is the first step to comprehension.

Compare the general and specific topics listed below:

General	**Specific**
Tests	Taking essay tests in college
Dating	Dating practices in Mexico
Boating	Boating safety tips for beginners

Adding **specific** information about a topic shows that you understand more about it than is indicated when you state only the **general** topic. To state a topic specifically, try adding information; write a short phrase instead of a single word.

Previewing to Locate the Topic

In Chapter One, we introduced the idea of **previewing** in the "Before You Read" step. We noted that you preview to determine if a selection is narrative or non-narrative. Now you have another reason to preview: previewing will help you discover the topic. Here are specific suggestions for previewing an article.

Begin by asking yourself, "What is the article about?" The answer can often be found in the title, so it is a good idea to look there first. Sometimes the title states the topic specifically: "Steps to Better Listening." If the topic is not specifically stated in the title ("Listening Skills"), you will want more information before reading the entire article. In this case, expand your preview by looking at any pictures, subtitles, and headings and reading the first and last paragraphs of the article. For more information read the first sentence of each paragraph. If the article is only one paragraph long, read the first and last sentences. The point is to *quickly* gain as much understanding as possible. When you read with the specific topic in mind, you usually read more quickly and with more comprehension.

MODEL 3.1: Locating the Topic of an Article

What is the article about? (**Topic**)

Re-Entry Students

Re-Entry students have a positive effect on college students, instructors, and the community. They are called "re-entry" students because they have been out of school for a period of time and have come back. Often students take college courses and then leave school for a variety of reasons: jobs, military training, family obligations, indecision about careers. No longer are college classes primarily made up of 18- to 20-year-old recent high school graduates. In many colleges, the average age of all students is approaching 30 years. Occasionally a student graduates from college for the first time at the age of 70 years or older. For younger students, re-entry students are often models of dedication and hard work. Returning men and women help set a mature tone in the classroom, and their life experiences add to the enjoyment of class discussions. Instructors often notice improved student interaction in a class with a wide variety of ages and backgrounds. Students who have had careers in the workplace, the military, or as homemakers add a wealth of information and perspective to a class. Finally, the community benefits from better-educated citizens of all ages. Private businesses and government agencies get workers with better skills and the community gets better-informed citizens and voters. When students re-enter college to improve their lives, they also improve the lives of countless others.

The effects of re-entry students

Or you might write,

Re-entry college students' effects on others

COMMENTS: There are no pictures or headings, so the suggestion is to read the first and last sentence. In the first sentence the words *positive effect* are used. In the last sentence, the verb *improve* is used twice, clearly indicating an effect. Notice that the topic can be stated in more than one way. Reading comprehension is greatly improved when you know the specific topic. From now on, when we use the term topic, we mean the **specific topic**.

ACTIVITY 3.1

Preview the following article and write the topic.

The Key to Good Memory

Good memory depends on interest in the information to be remembered. Most people believe they have a bad memory, but they usually focus only on times when memory fails them, forgetting all the things they regularly remember. For example, youngsters who enjoy baseball often remember batting averages, earned run averages, World Series results, and many other statistics. They clearly have a great capacity for remembering, but they might not remember ages, birthdays, anniversaries, and other numbers important to their parents. People interested in movies remember names and personal information of actors and actresses; those who don't watch many movies probably would not be able to recite this information. In short, interest is the key to good memory.

ACTIVITY 3.2: Locating the Topic of an Article

The following paragraphs are an excerpt from "They Live the Dream" by Dan Rather. In his article, Mr. Rather writes about **a common thread running though the stories of many Americans who find their own dream within the American Dream.** The words in boldface type in the previous sentence are the topic of the whole article. Preview and determine the topic of the following article. Write the topic.

ACTIVITY 3.3

Preview the following article and write the topic.

Curtis G. Aikens: A Dream on Hold
by Dan Rather

Curtis Aikens, who grew up in rural Conyers, GA, puts a face to one of those literacy statistics we hear but sometimes cannot believe: he went through high school and five semesters of college without learning how to read. One of the millions who

fall through the cracks and keep falling, Aikens believes that he would have disappeared completely if he hadn't, at 26, finally asked for help. Of his literacy tutors, Aikens says, "They didn't change my life. They saved my life."

Aikens put his new skills to good use. A lifelong lover of cooking and food, he started his own produce company in his hometown, became a food columnist and began to focus on his version of the American Dream: "I said to myself, 'I'm going to become a celebrity.' " But it wasn't fame alone he was pursuing, he explains. "It was so, when I talk about the fact that I couldn't read, other non-reading adults will say, 'If he can do it, I can too!' " Today, Aikens has three cookbooks to his name and appears on *Calling All Cooks* on the Food Network. But, he says, he hasn't reached his goal. "I'm still trying to obtain the American Dream, because I want to give everybody the ability to read. I know that sounds hokey, but there it is."

Locating the Main Idea

The **main idea** of an article is the major point the author makes about a topic. In an article, the main idea is often called the **thesis statement**. In a paragraph, the main idea is often called the **topic sentence**.

Do the Facts Ever Lie?

In many controversial articles, there is one set of facts, but two different interpretations. The readers of such articles must question both the facts and the interpretations and make up their own minds. Good readers think and read critically; they do not blindly accept someone else's conclusions.

A study by the National Center for Health Statistics is a good example of why critical thinking is so important. The study concludes that children in nonsmoking households are likely to be healthier than children who live with smokers. The study shows that 4.1 percent of young children in households with smokers were in fair to poor health. Only 2.4 percent of the children never exposed to tobacco smoke were in fair to poor health. However, this conclusion is disputed by the tobacco industry.

The claim by the tobacco industry is that the difference is really one of income levels. In other words, they believe that the study does not take all factors into consideration. It is unfair, they say, to single out smoking as the big cause of the health problems.

The two sides in this dispute are using the same facts, but are interpreting them differently. Therefore, it is up to the readers to question all aspects of the contro-

versy. They need to ask a number of questions: "What is the bias or motive of the tobacco industry in this case?" "Why would a government agency interpret statistics this way?" "How was the study conducted?" "Are there other reasons why these children have poorer health?" These and other questions must be asked in order to make a judgment about such a dispute. Good readers evaluate information; they do not just accept it.

The difference between the main idea and the topic is that the topic is an incomplete thought that does not show an opinion. The main idea, on the other hand, is a complete sentence that states an opinion. Although the topic may be specific, it does not reveal the author's main point. Notice how much clearer and more complete the main ideas in the right column are than the topics on the left.

Topic (subject)	**Main Idea (opinion)**
The Internet	is a useful research tool.
School uniforms	should be mandatory in K-12 schools.
Professional athletes	should not be paid so highly.
Spanking children	is a form of child abuse.
Anti-cigarette ads	are ineffective.

Note that the word order can often be changed. For example, one might write

A useful research tool	is the Internet.
A form of child abuse	is spanking children.

ACTIVITY 3.4

Extend the following topics into main idea statements by writing complete thoughts that express an opinion about the topic.

The Internet _____

School uniforms _____

Professional athletes _____

The main idea is the author's point about the topic. In examples shown below, the topic is written in italics and the author's opinion is shown in boldface type. Notice that the opinion can be stated before or after the topic.

Knowing how to take essay tests **is a useful skill in college.**

Dating practices in Mexico **are considerably different than those in the United States.**

Before driving a boat, a person needs to know some basic *boating safety tips.*

How to Find the Main Idea

To find the main idea, ask, "What is the author's main point about the topic?" To answer this question, begin by looking at the clues that helped you identify the topic (the title, headings, pictures). For further clues, read the first and last paragraphs of the article (or the first and last sentences of a short article) because authors often state the main idea near the beginning or end of an article. If you find a sentence that states the main idea, underline it. Often the main idea is not stated in one sentence. You may have to write it yourself. Even if it is stated, rewrite it *in your own words* to be sure you understand it.

Tips for Writing Main Idea Statements

1. It is important that the sentence you write be a *complete sentence*. A complete sentence contains a subject and a verb, and it expresses a complete thought.

Complete:
Knowing how to use the Internet sources can help students succeed in college.

Not Complete:
Internet sources and college student success.
Using Internet sources to succeed in college.
How using Internet sources can help students succeed in college.

2. State the main idea directly; don't announce the topic.

Statement of main idea:
Knowing how to use Internet sources can help students succeed in college.

Announcement of topic: (not a statement of main idea)
The main idea of this article is about how Internet sources can help students be successful in college.

Whether you rewrite a sentence by the author or write your own main idea sentence, you need to read the article to discover if you have correctly identified the main idea. If you are correct, most of the information in the article will in some way describe, explain, or offer examples of the main idea. In this regard, it might help to remember that the main idea is sometimes called the **controlling idea**. This makes sense because the main idea *controls* the details and examples the author selects for the article. If most of the information does not relate to the main idea statement you have written, you should write a **new main idea** sentence based on your careful reading of the article.

MODEL 3.2: Finding the Topic and Main Idea of an Article

Taking Tests

What is the first thing you do when you take a test? If you are like most students, you probably start by answering the first question, then proceed through the test, answering the rest of the questions in order. However, there is a better way. *If you follow a few simple steps, you can make test-taking easier and improve your grades.*

The first step is to preview. Spend a few minutes scanning the test to find out how many questions there are and what types of questions are asked (multiple choice, true-false, essay, etc.). Pay attention to all directions. Notice how many points are assigned to different questions or sections. With this information in mind, next make a plan of how much time to spend on each question of the test and of which questions to answer first. Allow more time for sections worth the most points.

The third step is to begin with the section that is easiest for you. This will insure a few quick, easy points for you and will probably give you a positive feeling that will help get you through the test. Confidence is important to good performance on a test, and tackling questions you know the answers to will help your confidence.

Finally, when you come to questions that you cannot answer or are unsure about, skip them for the time being. After you have finished the rest of the test, you can come back to these questions, try to answer them, or guess if there is no penalty for guessing.

What is the article about? (**Topic**)

The value of a test-taking system.

Or you might write,

A good procedure for taking tests.

What is the author's main point about the topic? (**Main Idea**)

A test-taking system can help you get better grades.

Or you might write,

You can get better grades on tests if you follow four easy steps.

MODEL 3.3: Finding the Topic and Main Idea of an Article

Here is another excerpt from Dan Rather's book, *The American Dream*. Read the article, then study the sample topic and main idea statements that follow the article.

A Troubled Young Man With an Odd Premonition About His Future
by Dan Rather

Wayne Ford was in eighth grade when a teacher asked the class to write their obituaries. How would they like to be remembered? Ford, who lived in a rough area of Washington, DC, came up with a curious response: he said he would make his mark in the Midwest. He would be active in politics and in charge of a community center.

Wayne Ford would go on to get in trouble in high school. "I was doing drugs, robbing, breaking into apartments," he recalls. To get away, he accepted a football scholarship to a small, nearly all-white Minnesota college. Once there, however, racism threatened to throw him off course. Instead, he turned his anger to activism and founded the school's black student union.

"Then," he says, "it all started to come together. The worst things in my life were the things that had the potential to make me great." Ford devoted himself to academics. History especially gave him a new perspective. "When I started reading it," he says, "I thought, 'My God, the world has gone through hell, not just Wayne Ford.' "

After graduation, Ford turned to politics. Today, he's living the dream he had as a boy: he's the only black member of the Iowa State Legislature and the founder and executive director of Urban Dreams, a nonprofit community program for at-risk youth. Last year, he spoke before the Democratic National Convention. It was one of the biggest achievements of his life, but he says, "It wasn't the cherry on the ice cream. The best is yet to come."

What is the article about? (**Topic**)

A troubled boy who had a positive vision about his future

Or you might write

A boy who used his dreams to turn his anger into activism
What is the author's main point about the topic? (**Main Idea**)

Wayne Ford's vision of himself as a positive contributor to society when he was in junior high helped him overcome his anger and troubles in school.

Or you might write,

Wayne Ford overcame his troubled school years and became an important policy maker by following his dream.

ACTIVITY 3.5

Dyslexia: Recognizing Shapes, Not Sounds
by Sarah Vandershaf
from *Psychology Today*

Read these words. You probably can almost hear them as you read. Dyslexics, however, may lack this inner ear for language, making reading more difficult for them than it is for most people.

A preliminary study by psychologist Karen Gross-Glenn and others has shown differences in the patterns of brain activity in dyslexic and nondyslexic readers. The researchers pinpointed 60 structures throughout the brain thought to be involved in aspects of reading—eye movements, language and memory, among others—and measured their activity in six dyslexic and eight nondyslexic readers.

Gross-Glenn and her colleagues found that reading stimulates different regions in dyslexics' brains than it does in the nondyslexics. In both groups, visual regions in the brain were activated. But dyslexics' brains showed less activity than the others' in the posterior peri-insular cortex, a region important for interpreting the sound of words.

The pattern of activity in the dyslexics' brains did resemble that of one group of nondyslexics that the researchers also studied; five people who viewed pictures, but did not read. This leads Gross-Glenn to believe that these dyslexics recognize words by how they look, not by how they sound.

"Many dyslexics read holistically," says Gross-Glenn. "They look at the 'envelope' of the word, the overall configuration." In this way, a dyslexic person could easily confuse a word like "publish" with "polish," since the two are very similar in their outward "shape."

Gross-Glenn also found differences in brain activity among the dyslexics themselves, perhaps reflecting different subgroups of dyslexia. Nonetheless, she is already applying her findings in remedial-reading programs that she hopes will help many types of dyslexics overcome their difficulties with the written word.

Karen Gross-Glenn, Ph.D., is at the University of Miami School of Medicine. She and her colleagues presented this research at a meeting of the Society for Neuroscience.

Preview the following article to determine the topic and main idea. After your preview, underline the main idea sentence(s). Then, write the main idea in your own words.

ACTIVITY 3.6

The Tyranny of the "Shoulds" by Carol Willmett, L.C.S.W. from *Parenting Exchange*

We have a lot of "shoulds" that we must meet in order to believe ourselves to be "good." As parents, partners, and friends, we lay pressure on ourselves and others to strive for perfection. Often, the "shoulds" are demands we place on ourselves because of childhood teachings, ideals promoted by our society, and images set forth by the media.

In my work with individuals and families, I have watched with dismay as people flog themselves with their "failures" because they have numerous "shoulds," many

of which are not realistic. For example, a woman may feel guilty if she is unable to achieve the perfect body and calls herself "lazy." She may be criticized if her home is not clean. A man may be embarrassed to admit his wife is smarter or makes more money then he does because a man "should" be the primary breadwinner. Others may push themselves to provide their children with opportunities such as dance or gymnastic classes or clothes as expensive as those their peers wear, even if it creates hardship on other family members.

I use a simple technique, which others have found helpful. I do not argue with the Ten Commandments as "shoulds," as many people rely on basic biblical teaching as their moral as well as legal standard of behavior. Indeed, our laws are based on that standard. (thou shalt not kill, steal, lie, et al.). Anything else, however, is subject to challenge of changing the "sh" to a "c."

Shifting from "should" to "could" affects the feelings conveyed from a mandate to a choice. I could lose weight, make more money, become more organized, etc., feels much less critical and judgmental than the same expression as should. Guilt and resentment are greatly lessened by this simple change.

Just as many of us learned to be self-critical from our parents, we pass those attitudes on to our own children. Telling a child, "You should be more interested in school, should want to share your toys, or should want to play with your brother (even if he is a pain!)" sets up the child whose feelings are not "ok" to feel angry or to feel like a failure.

I encourage you to try this simple exercise. If you are able to become more accepting of yourself, you will also be less critical and demanding of others. Life can become much more enjoyable.

Preview the following article to determine the topic and main idea. After your preview, underline the main idea sentence(s). Then, write the main idea in your own words.

ACTIVITY 3.7

Test De-Stress
by Keith Blanchard
from *Young & Modern (YM)*

Some of the difficult words in the article are listed below in the order in which they appear. In the text, these words are underlined. As you preview, look at the context in which the words are used.

adrenalin
subconsciously
carbohydrates
nausea
diarrhea
doofus
deprivation
hilarious

It's exam period, and you feel as if you're in a movie: The Exams That Ate My Life. *You can't even read the back of a cereal box without highlighting the salient points. Are you going insane? More important, are you going to pass? Here's a handy guide to get through exams with your mind—and GPA—intact.*

Emotions in Motion

While a little anxiety can be good for you (it pumps up your **adrenaline** and helps focus your attention), when stress starts to interfere with studying or with taking an exam, it's time to take action.

Pre-test Stress

Feeling angry, depressed, restless, or nervous around test time can be a result of negative self-instructions. According to Linda Locher, Ph.D., director of Counseling and Psychological Services for the University of Rochester, "We all have self-image messages we **subconsciously** play in our head. I call them 'muzak tapes.' At exam time they're usually along the lines of 'I hope I do well.' But for the highly stressed person, the messages become 'I'm stupid,' or 'I'm going to fail.' The key is to recognize these negative messages and replace them with coping ones. Whenever you think, 'This is too hard,' or 'I'll never get through this,' counter these thoughts with, 'This may be hard, but I didn't get here by luck,' or 'I may not be a genius, but I can pass a calculus test.' "

Mid-test Stress

"If you don't manage your stress well *during* an exam, it can build until you really can't perform at all," claims Dr. Locher. And that makes you susceptible to "dumb errors," like leaving out parts of an answer or misreading a question. To combat mid-test stress, stop and close your eyes for a second between questions, blank your mind, and you'll be more receptive to the new question. Try to focus on a pleasant image: You're lying on a beach in Mazatlan with a diploma curled between your toes. "Sometimes it helps just to rephrase the question in your own words," claims Pam Reynolds,* a senior at Spencer-Van Etten High School in New York. "Teachers and professors try to make the questions sound tougher than they are."

Physical Stress Busters

Many students mistakenly view the physical symptoms of stress, which range from sweaty palms to headaches, **nausea**, and **diarrhea**, as unrelated to the stress itself. "As if I didn't have enough on my mind with this Pig Latin 201 exam, now I have to get sick, too!" But if exams make you barf, it may be because you're giving your mind a workout but neglecting your body. In other words, you can't just sit in your room with your eyelids stapled up, highlighting textbooks and shoveling pizza into your mouth. Larry Merkel, M.D., staff psychiatrist. Student Health Service at the University of Pennsylvania, offers some tips for keeping your body from falling apart during exams.

Brain Food

Try eating six mini-meals instead of three large ones, since big meals make you sleepy. In terms of *what* to eat, protein (yogurt, peanut butter, cheese) is your best bet because it gives you long term energy. Sugar (Ding Dongs, chocolate bunnies) gives you energy, but the "sugar high" is deceptive because you crash soon afterward. You should also avoid OD-ing on **carbohydrates**, such as pasta and bread. They bog you down, making sleep more attractive than studying. And speaking of sleep, caffeine does help you stay up late, but unfortunately, large amounts affect your cognitive ability, making it harder to learn new things—so if you absolutely need coffee to stay awake, drink no more than three or four cups in a 24-hour period, and wait an hour or two between "doses."

Mental Floss

There are two types of study breaks—short ones and long ones—and you need both for efficient studying. Short breaks let your mind take a breath and should be taken often. "Find out your study attention span (usually 45-60 minutes)," advises Dr. Merkel, "and take a two- to five-minute break ten or 15 minutes short of that. Waiting until you're exhausted wears down your system and builds up frustration." You should also take slightly longer breaks, say 15 to 20 minutes, every three hours.

Let's Get Physical

Jogging your memory isn't enough. It's also important to get regular exercise during exam time. According to Dr. Merkel, a quick 20-minute workout every day or so will keep your body in tune and keep anxiety tuned out. And it will help you sleep better.

Stay Up or Hit the Sack?

You can't stay up three nights before the exam and expect to do well. "Sleep deprivation really takes its toll," claims Dr. Merkel. "Some sleep is always better than none." There's no minimum requirement of sleep, though you should try to maintain your

normal sleeping habits. And if you are forced to pull an all-nighter, don't do it more than one night in a row and try to work in at least a two-hour nap the next day.

Practical Tips for the Practically Ready (and the Hopelessly Unprepared)

Before the Exam

1. *Know your exam schedule*. This will help you spot scheduling problems and give you an idea of when to do your studying. Claims Dr. Merkel, "Some students spend all their energy studying for their first exam and find they're too exhausted afterward to continue at the same pace."
2. *Find out what you can about each exam.* How long is it? Can you bring a calculator? Is it multiple choice, fill in the blanks, or essay? Consult old tests (if available), talk to people who've taken the course, or ask the professor. It will help you organize your studying and make you more confident.
3. *Make up study cards*. Summarize the important points from lectures, readings, and old tests into a few study sheets organized so you can quiz yourself. Just making up the cards lets you run through the stuff once, plus you won't have to lug books around to study.
4. *Choose study partners carefully.* Study groups are helpful if you have a fairly good grasp of the material. They're a waste of time if you haven't even begun to study.
5. *Set your alarm clock*. Every school counselor tells the *hilarious* story about the student who stayed up all week and then slept through the test. Nobody ever laughs.

On Exam Day

1. *Eat light.* The old advice about eating a big breakfast before an exam is wrong, according to experts: It sends blood to your stomach instead of to your head, where you really need it. You should eat a moderate-sized breakfast a few hours before the test, so you can have time to digest your meal.
2. *Relax.* Take a deep breath; let your heart slow down. You have plenty of time. You know this stuff. Look at the **doofus** over there *still* cramming. Thank heaven you're not him.
3. *Do what you know first.* Get all the guaranteed points you can, then come back to the difficult questions. It builds confidence and opens up the right sections of your mind, which will help you remember things you think you don't know.
4. *If you have a question, ask*. Your professor or teacher might be able to rephrase the question in a way that makes more sense.

Keith Blanchard is a freelance writer/editor living in Summit, NJ.

Note

* Name has been changed.

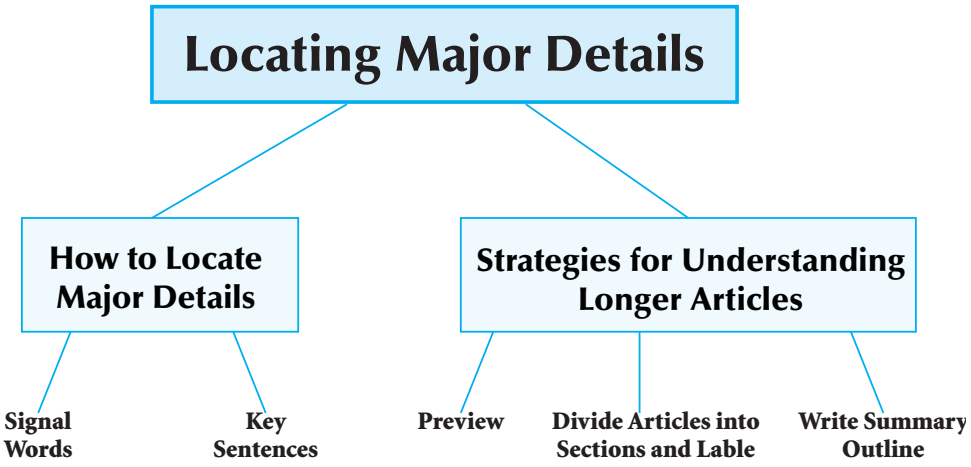
"Test De-Stress" by Keith Blanchard. From *Young and Modern*, May 1990. Reprinted by permission.

Preview the following article and write the topic. If you can determine a main idea sentence from the preview, underline it. Then state it in your own words. If you do not find a main idea sentence, read enough of the article to determine the main idea before writing it in your own words.

Self-Check Review

1. What are the steps for finding the topic of an article?
2. What is the difference between a general and a specific topic? Which do you use for the topic of your reading? Why?
3. What are the steps for determining the main idea?
4. How is the main idea different from the topic?
5. How can you use the information in this chapter in school, at work, and in your personal life? ✦

Chapter Four



You have a natural curiosity that makes you want to understand both an author's point and the reasoning or support for that point. This sense of curiosity can be developed, for it is essential to critical thinking. Only by examining an author's logic can you intelligently agree or disagree with the main point.

The models and exercises in this chapter will help you to

- Locate the major details of an article.
- Restate the major details of an article in outline form.

How to Locate Major Details

Major details answer the question "How does the author support the main idea?" Authors use facts, examples, explanations, scientific proof, or combinations of these to support and clarify the main idea of an article.

A simplified outline of an article might look something like this:

Topic
- Main Idea
  - Major Detail
    - Facts, examples, explanation
  - Major Detail
    - Facts, examples, explanation
  - Major Detail
    - Facts, examples, explanation

If you know the topic, the main idea, and the major details of an article, you understand it well. Often readers recognize major details by looking for signal words.

Signal Words

Major details are often indicated by **signal words and phrases** (sometimes called **transitions**). For example, the word *finally* usually indicates that the author is about to state the final point. In the sentence you just read, the signal phrase *for example* is used to indicate that an example follows.

The following signal words and phrases are grouped according to their function. This list is not a complete one, but looking at these examples will help you learn to identify signal words.

EXAMPLE 4.1: Signal Words

Words That Signal Time or the Order of Importance

first	finally	before
in the first place	when	after that
second	then	later on

Words That Signal Contrast or an Opposite Point

however	in contrast	despite
but	by contrast	although
on the contrary	in spite of	nevertheless

Words That Signal the Conclusion of an Idea

in conclusion to	sum up	finally

therefore	in short	as a result
consequently	in summary	

Words That Signal the Same or a Similar Idea

and	more than that	likewise
furthermore	also	similarly
moreover	in the same manner	

Words That Signal Causes and Effects

because	due to	consequently
since	therefore	as a result

Words That Signal Examples

for example	for instance	to illustrate

CAUTION: Even though major details are often introduced by signal words and phrases, authors also use them for other purposes. Therefore, you need to read carefully; don't assume that behind every signal word is a major detail. Also, remember that a major detail is not always signaled with one of these words or phrases. Sometimes the author signals a new major detail with key sentences or by starting a new paragraph.

ACTIVITY 4.1

Skim (read very quickly) the article on page ???, looking for words that might be signal words, but are not on the lists provided in Example 4.1. With two or three classmates, discuss the words you have underlined, and together determine if they are signal words.

Once you have identified the main idea of an article, you will want to identify the major details. Because signal words often help identify major details, it is a good idea to underline them. In the following model, the first sentence is underlined to indicate the main idea, and the signal words (or phrases) that help identify major details are in bold print.

MODEL 4.1: Identifying Major Details With the Help of Signal Words

Read the following article and notice the signal words and phrases that indicate major details.

Improving Your Memory

How is your memory? It is probably only when your memory fails that you think about it. An occasional lapse is normal. *The key to "managing" your memory and improving it is to understand how memory works.*

First, in order to remember something, you need to have sensory input, that is, a sensation needs to be recorded by one of your senses. For example, a plane flies over your house and you hear it, or a cake is burning in the oven and you smell it.

However, sensory input is not enough. Your eyes and ears might be seeing and hearing numerous sights and sounds, but you can only focus on a few at any one time. The ones you focus on are the ones you are most likely to remember.

Furthermore, to improve your memory retention, you must consciously intend to remember certain sights, sounds, smells, or other stimuli and then focus on them. For example, at a party, you might be introduced to several people. If you feel it is important to remember their names, focus on their names and faces and make an effort to remember them. If necessary, use word associations to help you remember. Without the intention to remember, you probably won't retain the name in the first place. Or you may forget it as soon as you hear it because you did not make any special effort to remember.

Although conscious effort is necessary, it is not enough for lasting memory. You will not remember the sensory input for very long if you do not do something to place it in your long-term memory. You *also* need to review the new information within 24 to 48 hours to remember it over time. Periodic review will ensure that you never forget the information.

In conclusion, improving your memory by using this technique is not difficult. Practice it often to improve your retention skills. Pay attention to the input, your intent to remember, and, of course, review. You have the power to remember anything you want—if you choose to.

COMMENTS: The title provides the topic, and the main idea of the entire article is stated in the first paragraph. Paragraphs two, three, and four each contain one major detail. Paragraph five has two signal words, but only one major detail because *although* signals a transition from paragraph four. Paragraph six (the conclusion) restates the main idea and major details.

MODEL 4.2: Identifying Major Details With the Help of Signal Words

You read "Taking Tests" in Chapter Three. Read it again here, noticing the signal words in boldface type that indicate major details.

Taking Tests

What is the first thing you do when you take a test? If you are like most students, you probably start by answering the first question, and then proceed through the test, answering the rest of the questions in order. However, there is a better way. If you follow a few simple steps, you can make test-taking easier and improve your grades.

The **first** step is to preview. Spend a few minutes scanning the test to find out how many questions there are and what types of questions are asked (multiple choice, true-false, essay, etc.). Pay attention to all directions. Notice how many points are assigned to different questions or sections. With this information in mind, **next** make a plan of how much time to spend on each question of the test and of which questions to answer first. Allow more time for sections worth the most points.

The **third** step is to begin with the section that is easiest for you. This will insure a few quick, easy points for you and will probably give you a positive feeling that will help get you through the test. Confidence is important to good performance on a test, and tackling questions you know the answers to will help your confidence.

Finally, when you come to questions that you cannot answer or are unsure about, skip them for the time being. After you have finished the rest of the test, you can come back to these questions, try to answer them, or guess if there is no penalty for guessing.

A summary outline of this article would look like this:

Topic: Test-taking made easier

Main Idea: Four easy steps can help you earn better test scores.

Major Detail: Preview before answering

Major Detail: Plan how to use your test time

Major Detail: Begin with easiest section of the test

Major Detail: Temporarily skip questions you don't know

COMMENTS: Notice that a good understanding of the article can be shown with just the main idea and major details. Furthermore, stating the main idea and major details in your own words will show your basic understanding of the article.

ACTIVITY 4.2

The main idea of the following article is underlined. To practice locating major details, do the following:

- Underline the signal words that indicate major details.
- Write a summary outline that includes the topic, main idea, and major details. Remember to write the outline in your own words to be sure you understand the material.

How to Preview a Textbook

One of the most helpful things you can do when you begin a new class in college is to preview your textbook. To do this follow these simple steps:

First, examine the table of contents. This will quickly tell you how many chapters are in the book and the nature of the material covered. Second, read the "To the Student" section or the Preface, if there is one, to see how the book is organized and how the author approaches the material. Among other things, this will tell you if the book is practical or theoretical in approach. Then examine the copyright date to see how recent the text is. This could be important. If you want recent information on medicine or world geography, for example, you do not want a very old book. Finally, check to see what special features the book contains. For example, is there an index at the back listing important terms and concepts? Is there a glossary where terms are defined? Is the book arranged chapter-by-chapter or alphabetically? Is there an appendix of additional information? Are there summaries at the end of each chapter? By taking just a few minutes to preview your next textbook, you can get more out of your book in a shorter amount of time.

Key Sentences

An author does not always write signal words before major details. When there are few or no signal words, you must look for key sentences that contain reasons,

causes, effects, examples, or steps of a process. Ask yourself, "Which sentences in the article make the main idea understandable or believable?"

MODEL 4.3: Locating Major Details Without the Aid of Signal Words

Read the following article and notice the major details that are in italics. The first sentence is underlined because it is the main idea.

Test Anxiety

Whenever I take a test I get nervous, and it shows. I can't help it. *My hands shake so much I can hardly hold my pen.* I' m sure everyone notices, but I can't control it. They must think I have some disease of the muscles, but it only happens at test time. *The palms of my hands get sweaty, and I have to keep wiping them on my pants to keep them dry.* Shaky, sweaty hands do not write good tests.

My stomach tightens up and my head aches. I feel as if I have eaten too much, even when I have an empty stomach. It's very distracting, even painful. If I take a pain reliever for my headache, it often further irritates my stomach. I am just not able to think about the test.

I am working to control my nervousness but have not had much luck. I will keep trying, but I may need to get some help. It is a problem too big for me to tackle alone right now.

COMMENTS: Even though no signal words are used to indicate major details, it is clear that the major details describe physical reactions to nervousness about taking tests. The last paragraph is a restatement of the main idea expressing the author's intention to keep working on the problem.

ACTIVITY 4.3

Read the following article. Underline the main idea of the article and any signal words that indicate major details. Then write a summary outline listing the **topic, main idea,** and **major details**. Do not include signal words in your summary outline.

Why Take Good Notes?

Perhaps you have been told to take good notes in order to get better grades. "Oh sure," you think, "it might help, but it's a lot of work. It may not be worth the effort." Actually, taking good class notes is important for several reasons.

For one thing, note-taking helps you keep your mind on what the instructor is saying. If you are trying to write the important ideas of the lecture, you have to keep your mind focused. We all know how easy it is to let our minds wander during some classes.

Second, notes are a good memory aid. They remind you of future assignments and due dates, and they provide you with review sheets before tests. Most of us do not have photographic memories, but good notes can remind us of the classroom experience.

Sometimes an instructor lectures on the same ideas as those in your textbook. Often the textbooks are long and difficult to read. Good notes can help clarify material in the textbook when your instructor covers ideas from the book. It is important to get the necessary information, but it usually does not matter where you get it.

Last, good notes are a record of information that might not be included in your textbook, but which your instructor expects you to know. Often, instructors test primarily on class lectures, even when a textbook is assigned. You will find that, with very few exceptions, good class notes are more than worth all the effort it takes to produce them. The rewards are called good grades and pride in your accomplishment.

ACTIVITY 4.4

Read the following article. Underline the main idea and any signal words that indicate major details. Then write an outline listing the **topic, main idea,** and **major details**.

How to Take Good Notes

When you are convinced that good note-taking is important to your success in school, you might want to learn some of the important steps in the process. Often, no one has taught you how to take good notes, yet teachers have expected you to

do this since you have been in school. It's important to find the style that works for you, but several steps are involved in almost all good note-taking systems.

The first step is to date and label your notes. This is simple and quick, but it is important. It keeps your notes organized. If an instructor says you will be tested on the material from the two previous weeks, which covers the human skeleton, you will be able to quickly identify what to study.

Next, consider how your notes look. Two things are important here. Leave plenty of space as you take notes. This allows you to fill in words or ideas you may have missed and still keep your notes neat and readable. Furthermore, you should devise a method for indicating key points. Some people underline these points; others put a star or check beside them; still others indicate them by indenting either the major points or the sub-points. The important thing is not *how* you identify them, but that you *do* identify them.

Be sure you always take notes in your own words. To do this, develop your own shorthand or system of abbreviations so that you can concentrate on listening rather than on writing. Putting ideas in your own words, even in abbreviations, is the only way to be sure you understand the material.

Perhaps the most important step is to get in the habit of editing your notes soon after class. By doing this you will automatically review the important ideas from class, fill in any information you wrote down in sketchy form, and realize what you missed so that you can ask questions later. Try to review notes within twenty-four hours after class.

Strategies for Understanding Longer Articles

So far the articles in the models and exercises in this chapter have been rather short. Most articles you will read are much longer, and identifying the main idea and major details usually becomes a greater challenge due to the increased length. Like any other skill, however, the ability to find major details improves with practice. Here are some suggestions to help you develop this skill.

1. Follow *all* of the preview steps discussed in Chapter Three.
   - read the title
   - look at pictures, subtitles, and headings
   - read the first and last paragraphs
   - read the first sentence of each of the other paragraphs
   - read any questions that follow the article

2. Divide the article into sections that indicate the introduction, main idea, major details, and conclusion. The sections may consist of one or more paragraphs. Check the main idea of each paragraph to see if it is a major detail of the article. Do not assume that each paragraph contains a major detail.
3. Label each section of the article in the margin of the book.

MODEL 4.4: Identifying Major Details in an Article

The Importance of Childhood Memories
by Norman M. Lobsenz
From *Reader's Digest*

Section One: Introduction

Some years ago, when my young wife became desperately ill, I wondered how I would be able to cope with the physical and emotional burden of caring for her. One night, when I was drained of strength and endurance, a long-forgotten incident came to mind.

I was about ten years old at the time and my mother was seriously ill. I had gotten up in the middle of the night to get a drink of water. As I passed my parents' bedroom, I saw the light on. I looked inside. My father was sitting in a chair in his bathrobe next to Mother's bed, doing nothing. She was asleep. I rushed into the room.

"What's wrong?" I cried. "Why aren't you asleep?"

Dad soothed me. "Nothing's wrong. I'm just watching over her."

I can't say exactly how, but the memory of that long-ago incident gave me the strength to take up my own burden again. The remembered light and warmth from my parents' room were curiously powerful and my father's words haunted me: "I'm just watching over her." The role I now assumed seemed somehow more bearable, as if a resource [had] been called from the past or from within.

Section Two: Main Idea

In moments of psychological jeopardy, such memories often turn out to be the ultimate resources of personality, dark prisms which focus our basic feeling about life. As Sir James Barrie once wrote, "God gives us memory so that we may have roses in December."

Section Three: Major Detail
(*Can't predict what makes lasting memories*)

No parent can ever really know which memory, planted in childhood, will grow to be a rose. Often our most vivid and enduring remembrances are of apparently simple, even trivial things. I did not discover this myself until one bright, leaf-budding spring day when my son Jim and I were putting a fresh coat of paint on the porch railing. We were talking about plans to celebrate his approaching 15th birthday, and I found myself thinking how quickly his childhood had passed.

"What do you remember best?" I asked him.

He answered without a moment's hesitation.

"The night we were driving somewhere, just you and me, on a dark road, and you stopped the car and helped me catch fireflies."

Fireflies? I could have thought of a dozen incidents, both pleasant and unpleasant, that might have remained vivid in his mind. But fireflies? I searched my memory—and eventually it came back to me.

I'd been driving cross-country, traveling late to meet a rather tight schedule. I had stopped to clean the windshield, when all at once a cloud of fireflies surrounded us. Jim, who was five years old then, was tremendously excited. He wanted to catch one. I was tired and tense, and anxious to get on to our destination. I was about to tell him that we didn't have time to waste when something changed my mind. In the trunk of the car I found an empty glass jar. Into it we scooped dozens of the insects. And while Jim watched them glow, I told him of the mysterious cold light they carried in their bodies. Finally, we uncapped the jar and let the fireflies blink away into the night.

"Why do you remember that?" I asked. "It doesn't seem terribly important."

"I don't know," he said. "I didn't even know I did remember it until just now." Then a few moments later: "Maybe I do know why. Maybe it was because I didn't think you were going to stop and catch any with me—and you did."

Since that day I have asked many friends to reach back into their childhoods and tell me what they recall with greatest clarity. Almost always they mention similar moments—experiences or incidents not of any great importance. Not crises or trauma or triumphs, but things which, although small in themselves, carry sharp sensations of warmth and joy, or sometimes pain.

One friend I spoke with was the son of an executive who was often away from home. "Do you know what I remember best?" he said to me. "It was the day of the annual school picnic, when my usually very dignified father appeared in his shirt-

sleeves, sat on the grass with me, ate a box lunch, and then made the longest hit in our softball game. I found out later that he [had] postponed a business trip to Europe to be there." My friend is a man who experiences the world as a busy, serious place but who basically feels all right about it and about himself. His favorite childhood memory is both clue to and cause of his fundamental soundness.

Section Four: Major Detail (*Parents can help shape memories.*)

Clearly, the power parents have to shape the memories of their children involves an awesome responsibility. In this respect nothing is trivial. What to a grownup might seem a casual word or action often is, to a child, the kernel of a significant memory on which he will build. As grownups, we draw on these memories as sources of strength or weakness. Author Willa Cather saw this clearly. "There are those early memories," she wrote. "One cannot get another set; one has only those."

Not long ago, I talked with a woman who has married a young and struggling sculptor. She cheerfully accepted their temporary poverty. "I grew up during the depression," she said. "My dad scrambled from one job to another. But I remembered that each time a job ended, my mother would scrape together enough money to make us an especially good dinner. She used to call them our 'trouble meals.' I know now that they were her way of showing Dad she believed in him, in his ability to fight back. I learned that loving someone is more important than having something."

Section Five: Major Detail (*Steps to provide good memories.*)

If childhood memories are so important, what can parents do to help supply their children with a healthy set?

> For one thing, parents should be aware of the memory-building process. In our adult preoccupation, we tend to think that the "important" experiences our children will have are still in their future. We forget that, to them, childhood is reality rather than merely a preparation for reality. We forget that childhood memories form the adult personality. "What we describe as 'character,'" wrote Sigmund Freud, "is based on the memory traces of our earliest youth."
>
> Parents can try to find the extra energy, time, or enthusiasm to carry out the small and "insignificant" plan that is so important to a child. The simple act of baking that special batch of cookies or helping to build that model car, even though you are tired or harried, may make an important memory for your youngster.

Conversely, parents can try to guard against the casual disillusionments and needless disappointments which they often unthinkingly inflict on children. I would venture that almost everyone has a memory of an outing canceled or a promise broken without a reason or an explanation. "My father always used to say, 'We'll see,'" one man told me. "I soon learned that what that meant was 'no,' but without any definite reason."

Parents can think back to their own childhoods and call up their own memories. By remembering the incidents that made important impressions on them, parents can find guideposts to ways in which they can shape the future memories of their own youngsters.

Finally, parents can, by their own actions and words, communicate emotions as well as experiences to their children. We can give them a memory of courage rather than fear; of strength rather than weakness; of an appetite for adventure rather than a shrinking from new people and places; of warmth and affection rather than rigidity and coldness. In just such memories are rooted the attitudes and feeling that characterize a person's entire approach to life.

Sample Summary Outline

What is the article about? (**Topic**)

Childhood memories

Or you might write,

Why childhood memories are important

What is the author's main point about the topic? (**Main Idea**)

Childhood memories can help us get through tough times.

Or you might write,

In tough times, childhood memories can give us strength.

How does the author support the main idea? (**Major Details**)

Parents can't predict what makes lasting memories.
Parents can help shape their children's memories in four ways:

1. *be aware of the importance of memory process*
2. *try to find extra time and energy for children's activities*
3. *recall your own childhood memories*
4. *share both your emotions and experiences with children*

COMMENTS: Notice that not every paragraph contains a major detail. For example, Section One (the introduction) is five paragraphs long and Section Three (one long example) is nine paragraphs long.

ACTIVITY 4.5

Read the following article and complete all of the steps you have learned so far. Preview the article, divide it into sections and label them. Then write an outline stating the topic, main idea, and major details.

Listen Carefully
by Tom W. Harris
from *Nation's Business*

Some of the difficult words in the article are listed below in the order in which they appear. In the text, these words are in boldfaced type. As you preview, look at the context in which the words are used.

morale	***gestures***	***habitually***
enterprises	***maximize***	***diligence***

Effective listening can be used in business as well as in school to boost **morale**, *improve productivity, sell, teach, inform, or achieve other goals.*

Consultant Germaine Knapp wants you to hear something. "Effective listening—we call it power listening—is one of the strongest assets in professional life today," she says. "Too few of us take advantage of it, but all of us could. There are dozens of field-proven techniques and tactics for applying the power of listening, and they get results."

Knapp is president of Wordsmart Inc., a consulting and training firm in Rochester, NY. Her clients include Xerox and Eastman Kodak as well as banks, hospitals, manufacturers, and colleges. Training in listening skills is one of Knapp's specialties.

Knapp cites observations by Lyman K. Steil, a former University of Minnesota professor who is president of Communication Development Inc., a consulting firm in St. Paul, MN. He has developed and carried out programs designed to improve employees' listening skills. His programs have ranged from a multimillion-dollar, listening-oriented advertising campaign some years ago for Sperry Corp.—now Unisys—to training for countless small and midsized **enterprises**.

"Overall," Steil says, "if each of America's more than 100 million workers prevented just one $10 mistake by better listening, their organizations would gain over $1 billion in profits. A $10 mistake is as simple as a few minutes' error in the time of a meeting, putting an item of stock in the wrong place, or having to retype a letter."

Knapp says that effective listening—or power listening—can be used to help persuade, motivate, improve productivity, boost morale, obtain cooperation, sell, teach, inform, or achieve other goals. "Effective listening is continually active, not passive," she says. "For example, to draw out information from the other person and get the whole story, actively show that you're listening. We train people in a number of techniques that are very simple—and very effective," such as **gestures** and comments.

Gestures and mannerisms can communicate interest. Lean forward rather than back while listening, Knapp suggests. Nod occasionally to show comprehension. Smile. Look directly at the person speaking. Comments such as "I see" and "Go on" can show that you are attuned to what the speaker is saying. When used with sincerity, these tactics can pay dividends.

Another way to improve listening is to take notes, Knapp says. "It helps make you focus on the highlights of what's being said. And the other person, seeing you write things down, will usually try to **maximize** accuracy and clarity. One word of caution: Too much note-taking may make some people angry or nervous and uncommunicative."

Consultant Steil has found that note taking also works in phone conversations. He cites the example of a salesman who **habitually** made comments such as, "Just a second—could you mention that again—I want to write it down." In the salesman's

view, "better listening made better sales." Customers became more precise in explaining their needs, he said, and they were favorably impressed with his **diligence** for detail.

Business people in various fields have adopted effective-listening tactics. For example, Dan Fazenden, president of Roger Fazenden Realty Inc., a real estate company near Minneapolis, says: "I use the 'plan to report' principle. When someone tells you something, listen so intently that you could report it all to someone else."

It is important to "listen for what isn't said," Knapp says, as well as to ask questions. She stresses two important rules:

"Never end a conversation without being sure what was said—and why. Furthermore, don't pretend you understand when you don't. Chances are the speaker, not you, caused the confusion. So don't walk away and later make mistakes that you, not the speaker, will be held responsible for."

Once your employees become good listeners, it will pay you in turn to listen to those listeners, says auto dealer John Zimbrick of Madison, WS. Zimbrick's employees listen to customers to determine their attitudes, and management keeps current on the employees' findings. "It can be even more effective than customer-research projects," says Zimbrick. "Many firms can't afford specialized customer research. This can do the job better."

The other side of power listening is the power to make other people listen. Knapp explains: "One of the most skillful communicators I know of has an office position in a medium-sized business. When she senses somebody isn't listening, she stops talking. She lets two or three seconds tick away. The other person 'hears' this pause and gets back to listening." Other effective tactics, she says, include leaning forward, standing up, gesturing, asking a question.

For a typical employee, Knapp says, time spent communicating during the workday may be as high as 50 percent, and for top managers, the figure can reach 75 percent. "An average 45 percent of this time is spent listening," she says. "So, either for an individual or an organization, when you polish up listening skills, you may well be tapping into your greatest undeveloped success resources."

ACTIVITY 4.6

Read the following article and complete all of the steps you have learned so far. Preview the article, divide it into sections and label them. Then write an outline stating the topic, main idea, and major details.

You and Public Speaking
from *The Public Speaker/The Public Listener*

When you decided to register for this course in public speaking, you may have been thinking, "I like to get up and speak to audiences, so this class should be no problem." Maybe, though, your thoughts were more in the line of "Me, get up before a class and give a speech? No way!" If that was your response, feel some comfort in realizing that for most of us there is an element of uncertainty, or in some cases out-and-out fear, when it comes to **public speaking**—the act of communication that occurs between one person and an audience.

Some people actually do enjoy speaking before groups. If that were not true we would not have politicians, teachers, media performers, and religious leaders. On the other hand, research shows that 61 percent of the people in the United States are afraid of giving speeches.

One of the purposes of this book, and the course you are taking, is to teach you the skills necessary to prepare and present an effective speech or to reinforce the skills you already have. People who are confident of their public speaking abilities naturally have more positive attitudes about communicating to an audience than those who lack these skills.

A study aptly titled "Do Real People Ever Give Speeches?" revealed that, although many of us try to avoid public speaking, people at all levels do indeed give presentations. In fact, 55 percent of the respondents gave at least one speech to 10 or more people every two years; 71 percent of these speakers gave at least four speeches during that time. People with more education and income give speeches more frequently. Knowing this, a person who wants a high-income job is wise to get a solid education and prepare to become an effective speaker. And it is not only the business world which requires public speaking. Your participation in a class, club, volunteer activity, or political situation may call on your public communication skills.

No matter what your career choice, most college graduates enter occupations that require some form of speaking before groups, whether within the organization, at conferences or conventions, or as a representative of the company. Businesses are acutely aware of this requirement. A survey of Fortune 500 companies revealed that presentation skills were identified as "somewhat important" for secretarial staff and hourly wage workers; "important" for supervisors and technical staff; and "very important" for sales staff, executives, middle managers, and human resource staff. Eighty-two percent of the Fortune 500 companies responding to this survey indicated that presentation skills are so important that they provide speech training in order to increase employee performance.

Public speaking occurs both within the organization to groups of employees and to various groups outside, such as potential customers. Because communication is

so central to productivity and effectiveness, many organizations offer public speaking training for their employees. One such company with an intricate communication plan is Honeywell. Honeywell's corporate communication department has established a speakers' bureau with a specific public communication objective: to identify appropriate speaking platforms, negotiate media interviews, publish speakers' remarks, and provide opportunities to reach customers and prospects.

Interest in effective public communication also is reflected in the growth of speakers' agents, who book speakers for the annual sales meetings, conventions, and other large meetings that companies and organizations often sponsor. A former chief executive officer of Chrysler Corporation stresses that public speaking is "the best way to motivate a large group." The speaking industry is lucrative. Well-known celebrities can command $25,000 or more for a speech.

Skill in public speaking also is important in the academic arena. Students are asked to do classroom presentations of research projects, reports, experiments, and studies. Outside of class you might give a report to a student organization, make a proposal to your fraternity or sorority, represent a political candidate, or give a speech as part of a job interview.

Public communication is the lifeblood of political, legal, advertising, and promotional work. But you do not have to work in one of the media professions to be pressed into delivering a message effectively. During Operation Desert Storm, a military leader served as a highly effective communicator. The world was riveted to the television screen for regular briefings by General Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf. It was clear how much public speaking skills can accomplish. Schwarzkopf's success, though resounding, was not unique.

Public speaking has a long and colorful history. Being aware of this tradition allows us to realize that public speaking customs and processes are based on many trials and errors, theories, imitations of great speakers, and research into effective speaking.

Rate Your Presenting Skills

Labeling each of these statements as true or false will tell you if you know what it takes to be a powerful presenter:

1. Visuals will keep the audience's attention better if you use a variety of type fonts and sizes.
2. Memorizing a speech isn't a good idea.
3. Each visual should include no more then two key concepts.

4. Casually leaning back on one hip tells an audience that you're less formal and thus more believable.
5. To get an audience to think creatively, project information on the right side of a screen.

Answers: **1.** False. Audiences react better to consistency, so use no more than one or two fonts. Also, it's best to use a sans serif because it's easier to read in the larger sizes you need for the screen. **2.** True, but some experts recommend that you memorize the first minute or two to help build confidence by starting strong. **3**. False. Limit each visual to only one key concept or risk confusing an audience with too much to recall at once. **4.** False. It signals—nonverbally—that you wish you didn't have to be there. **5**. True. Research also shows that you should put the image or the words as high on the screen as you can get them.

Source: *Communication Briefing*, February 1998.

Self-Check Review

1. How do signal words help you to find major details?
2. How do you identify major details if there are no signal words?
3. Why is it important to locate major details?
4. How can you use the information in this chapter in school, at work, and in your personal life? ✦