

Determining the Main Idea of a Paragraph

DIRECTIONS: In the paragraphs below, identify the **topic** (subject). Then determine the **main idea** (what about the subject?)

For many parents, the infant's crying may be mainly an irritation, especially if it continues for long periods. But crying serves important functions for the child as well as for the parents. For the child, crying helps improve lung capacity and the respiratory system. Perhaps more important, the cry serves as a signal of distress. When babies cry, they indicate that they are hungry or in pain, and this is important information for parents.

- The topic is _____
- The main idea is _____

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Summer is a wonderful time to spend at West Beach. It is a beach with light-colored, soft sand. The coastline goes on for a long way and many people enjoy walking along it. Children like to play in the surf and walk along the rocks that are visible at low tide. This is a fun beach for people of all ages.

- The topic is _____
- The main idea is _____

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The movie Apollo 13 was a blockbuster for the summer of 1995. It is an exciting story about space exploration. In the movie, the astronauts get in trouble while they are trying to return to Earth. People in the audience are on the edge of their seats waiting to see what happens. What makes it even more exciting is that it is a true story.

- The topic is _____
- The main idea is _____

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Although the main idea of a paragraph is most often in the first sentence, the next most common placement is in the last sentence of a paragraph. The author gives supporting information first and then makes the point in the last sentence.

Here's a paragraph we can use as an example. Try to locate the topic and the main idea.

Most teenagers and young adults do not know what they want to do for the rest of their lives. It is a big decision. There are a number of things you can do to narrow the choices. For example you can take an interest test, do some research on your own about a career, try volunteer work in the field in which you are interested, or "job-shadow", in which you spend a day with a person who is working in a field that interests you. These are just a few helpful ideas as you begin to choose a career.

- The topic is _____
- The main idea is _____