

Reading Review

The COMPASS Reading Placement Test tests the ability to refer and reason based on the information presented. The following is a review of topics that may be found on this test.

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I. Finding the Main Idea

- The main idea is the author’s main point.
- The author’s main point is a general statement supported by specific details.
- Ask “what is the point being made about the topic?” to find the main idea.
- The main idea can be located at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph.

Practice Exercises

Exercise 1:

(1) For over a century, marketers have been using packaging to get consumers to buy their products. (2) Since the 1890s, Quaker Oats has put its rolled oats in a box with a picture of a religious Quaker. (3) The package suggests that their cereal is wholesome. (4) In 1898, a man named C.W. Post wanted to create the image of a healthy breakfast food. (5) So he placed a copy of the pamphlet “The Road to Wellville” in each box of Grape Nuts cereal. (6) Packaging is so important that store brands often try to take advantage of it by looking like the bestselling national brands. (7) Their packages imitate the color of the labels, the shape of the container, and so on.

What is the topic?

Cereal

Packaging

Products

Which sentence is the main idea of the passage?

1

4

6

Exercise 2:

(1) Many of our wedding customs reflect the fact that women once had little say in who their groom would be. (2) Before the twelfth century, the best man was a warrior friend who helped a man capture and kidnap a woman he desired, often from another tribe. (3) Carrying the bride over the threshold isn’t simply a romantic act. (4) Originally, it represented the kidnapping of the daughter who would not willingly leave her father’s house. (5) After a man captured or bought a bride, he disappeared with her for a while on a honeymoon, so that her family couldn’t rescue her. (6) By the time they found the couple, the bride would already be pregnant.

What is the topic?

Grooms

Wedding Customs

Kidnapping

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<http://www.townsendpress.net/home.php>

II. Word Meaning

Context clues used to find word meaning:

- the surrounding text
- examples of the new word
- synonyms: a word that means the same as another word
- antonyms: a word opposite in meaning to another word

Practice Exercises

Directions for Exercises 3 and 4: Using the surrounding text, choose the meaning of the bold-faced word.

Exercise 3:

On an **impulse**, Carla bought a lot of merchandise at the store's "going out of business" sale. She later regretted that she hadn't planned her purchases more carefully.

1. dare
2. review
3. sudden wish or urge

Exercise 4:

"Mr. Allen," said the instructor, "please **cease** cracking your gum in class."

1. enjoy
2. begin
3. stop

Directions for Exercises 5 and 6: Using the examples in the following sentences, choose the meaning of the bold-faced word.

Exercise 5:

Assets such as good health, a loving family, and an enjoyable job make life rewarding.

Assets are:

1. things of value
2. rewards on the job
3. helpful people

Exercise 6:

Newspaper reporters have been fired for **fictitious** reporting that included quotations which were never said and events that never occurred.

fictitious means:

1. true-life
2. unknown
3. not real

Directions for Exercises 7 and 8: Underline the synonym of the bold-faced word in the following sentences.

Exercise 7:

Hal was a **mediocre** student. He was an average baseball player as well.

Exercise 8:

Students are often **apprehensive** of final exams, but with the right study skills, they don't have to be fearful.

Directions for Exercises 9 and 10: In the following sentences, first underline the antonym of the bold-faced word then choose the meaning of the word in bold.

Exercise 9:

I thought it was difficult to **ascend** the mountain, but I discovered that climbing down it was even worse.

1. climb up
2. walk around
3. climb down

Exercise 10:

The teacher **commended** two students on the outstanding work they were doing. Then he criticized the rest of the class for doing so poorly.

1. blamed
2. graded
3. praised

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How many major details are in this paragraph?

- | | | |
|--------|----------|---------|
| 1. one | 3. three | 5. five |
| 2. two | 4. four | |

Exercise 13:

Identify the topic, main idea, and supporting details from the sentences below.

1. The spinal column prevents the body from caving in on itself.
2. The spinal column protects the delicate nerve tissue of the spinal cord.
3. Roles of the spinal column.
4. The human body could not function without the spinal column.

Topic: _____

Main Idea: _____

Supporting Details: _____

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IV. Inferences

- Inferences should be based on the facts presented.
- Conclusions drawn from inferences should be based on evidence, information, experiences, and common sense.

Practice Exercises

Directions for Exercises 14-17: Circle the letter of the inference that is based on the facts presented in each passage below.

Exercise 14:

“Do you believe in life after death?” the boss asked one of his employees.

“Yes, sir,” the new employee replied.

“Well, then, that makes everything just fine . . .” the boss went on. “After you left work early yesterday to go to your grandmother’s funeral, she stopped in to see you.”

What can be concluded from the information presented in the passage above?

- a. The dead grandmother’s ghost came to the office looking for her grandson.
- b. The boss has a wild imagination.
- c. The employee had lied about going to his grandmother’s funeral.

Exercise 15:

Research has shown that the average mother cradles her baby in her left arm. The position allows the infant’s head to be near the comforting sound of the mother’s heartbeat. Interestingly, this form of cradling has been noted worldwide among women in modern societies, in traditional villages, and in art depicting motherhood in centuries past.

The information in this passage shows that:

- a. Only mothers who are taught to cradle the baby on the left know they should do so.
- b. Mothers instinctively know how to cradle their babies in a comforting way.
- c. Fathers possess no instinctive skills to take care of children.

Exercise 16:

Fast foods tend to be high in calories and saturated fat. People who eat a lot of fast food are at greater risk for obesity. They’re also more likely to develop diabetes.

This passage shows that:

- a. Consumption of fast foods is linked to health problems.
- b. People who eat fast foods become obese.
- c. All fats are harmful.

Exercise 17:

Most animals don’t eat moss. It is hard to digest, and it has little nutritional value. But reindeer fill up with lots of moss. Why? The moss contains a special chemical that helps reindeer keep their body fluids warm.

Reindeer eat moss because:

- a. They like the taste.
- b. They live where it is very cold.
- c. It is the only food available.

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V. Implied Main Ideas and Central Points

- Main ideas may be suggested or implied. In cases such as these, the main idea may be inferred from the supporting details provided.
- Passages with more than one paragraph often have a “central point.” The central point may be stated or implied.
- To find the central point, look for the topic of the passage and consider the supporting details provided within the passage.

Practice Exercises

Directions for Exercises 18-20: For each passage, circle the letter of the sentence that is the implied main idea.

Exercise 18:

It was reported that in 1711, when work on St. Paul’s Cathedral in London was completed and shown to King George I, he exclaimed the building was “aweful” and “artificial.” Its architect, Christopher Wren, took the king’s judgment as a great compliment. In the 1700s, “aweful” meant “awe-inspiring,” and “artificial” meant “full of great artistry.”

- a. The meaning of words can change dramatically over the course of time.
- b. St. Paul’s Cathedral was designed by architect Christopher Wren.
- c. King George I was known to criticize people harshly.

Exercise 19:

In 1957, one researcher decided to investigate the power of subliminal advertising. At a movie theater, he inserted single-frame Coca-Cola and popcorn ads among the 26 frames projected on the movie screen every second. The appearance of the ads was so rapid that the audience was unaware of seeing them. But the researcher concluded that people’s subconscious minds perceived the ads. His evidence? Coca-Cola sales increased 18 percent and popcorn sales 57.9 percent after showings of the films with subliminal ads.

- a. People enjoy drinking Coca-Cola and eating popcorn while at the movies.
- b. Subliminal advertising is more effective on movie screens than on TV sets.
- c. Subliminal advertising appears to influence some people’s behavior.

Exercise 20:

In a tongue-in-cheek analysis of bureaucracies, Laurence Peter proposed what has become known as the Peter Principle: bureaucracy employees are promoted to their level of incompetence. People who perform well are promoted. If they again perform well, they're promoted again. This process continues until they're promoted to a level at which they no longer handle their responsibilities well; this is their level of incompetence. But if the Peter Principle were fully true, bureaucracies would be staffed entirely by incompetents and would function poorly. In reality, many bureaucracies function efficiently and smoothly.

- a. The Peter Principle is only partly true.
- b. Most bureaucracies are run by incompetents.
- c. Promotions tend to be unfair.

Directions for Exercises 21-23: In each of the exercises, choose the number that expresses the central point of the following passages.

Exercise 21:

(1) Fast-food chains serve billions of hamburgers each year to customers across North America, Europe, and Japan. (2) This enormous appetite for beef creates a massive need for cattle. (3) In response, beef suppliers in Brazil, Costa Rica, and other Latin American countries are devoting more and more national land to cattle ranches.

(4) Unlike cattle in the United States, Latin American cattle graze on grass. (5) This diet produces the lean meat demanded by fast-food corporations and restaurants. (6) However, a grass diet also requires a great deal of land for grazing. (7) What is the source of this extra grazing space? (8) Unfortunately, ranchers are using forest land. (9) Each year thousands of square miles of old forests are cleared to make room for cattle grazing. (10) These forests play a major role in maintaining the earth's atmosphere. (11) In other words, the desire for red meat has helped destroy invaluable forests and created an environmental problem that is impacting the entire planet.

Which sentence expresses the central point? _____

Exercise 22:

(1) It is not surprising that people get so worked up arguing over the true nature of wolves. (2) A look at stories about wolves shows that these two contrasting opinions—that wolves are wonderful creatures and that they are vicious, dangerous beasts—have been around for many years.

(3) In 1905, the American author Jack London wrote a novel called *White Fang*. (4) In that story, the title character is a wolf who, ultimately, lives peacefully with

human beings and even saves a man's life. (5) Native American legends and stories show a similar positive view of wolves. (6) Native Americans lived in harmony with these creatures, and they portrayed them in stories as their respected brothers. (7) Roman mythology also tells of a bond between wolves and human beings. (8) According to legend, an infant named Romulus, after being thrown out to die, was fed by a wolf; he survived and went on to found the city of Rome in 753 B.C.

(9) On the other hand, there are all sorts of stories and legends that promote the idea that wolves are dangerous, frightening creatures. (10) Stories of werewolves—men who turn into wolves and tear people apart—were common in Europe by the 1400s and are still believed in certain remote areas. (11) In Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, the hero is terrified when a pack of snarling wolves surround the carriage that is carrying him to Count Dracula's castle. (12) Even in children's literature, wolves are portrayed as evil creatures. (13) In "Little Red Riding Hood," for example, the villain is a wolf who devours Red Riding Hood's grandmother as well as the little girl.

Which sentence expresses the central point? _____

Exercise 23:

1) In recent years, DNA evidence has been used to free many prisoners who were convicted of crimes they did not commit. (2) Many of these prisoners were originally linked to their alleged crimes through the use of fingerprint evidence. (3) While fingerprint evidence can be useful in solving a crime, it is not as foolproof as some people think.

(4) Every individual in the world has a unique set of fingerprints, so it seems as though it should be a good tool for identification. (5) The problem arises in the difficulty of determining whether or not two sets of prints are an exact match. (6) For a set of fingerprints to be properly recorded, the fingers are inked and then rolled, one finger at a time, onto a flat surface. (7) Or else they are scanned into a machine that captures and stores each finger as a digital image. (8) Such properly recorded prints can be quickly analyzed by a computer, accurately identified, and matched with another set of properly recorded prints.

(9) Fingerprints found at a crime scene, however, are rarely clean and distinct. (10) A fingerprint at a crime scene frequently shows only about 20 percent of the whole fingertip. (11) And crime-scene prints are often distorted because they are on an uneven surface or, sometimes, have been covered in blood. (12) These partial prints are difficult to read. (13) A computer cannot make an accurate match from such a print.

(14) Therefore, it is up to fingerprint experts to compare the crime scene print with a properly recorded print. (15) A fingerprint expert must then determine, to the best of his or her ability, whether or not the prints match. (16) Frequently, the link between a crime-scene fingerprint and a particular individual is determined solely by

the skill and judgment of the person attempting to make the match. (17) Far from being foolproof, the determination is an inexact and subjective decision.

Which sentence expresses the central point? _____

More practice exercises can be found on Townsend Press Online Learning Center:

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Answer Key for Reading Practice Exercises

Finding the Main Idea

1. Packaging, 1
2. Wedding Customs, 1

Word Meaning

3. 3
4. 3
5. 1
6. 3
7. average
8. fearful
9. climb up, climbing down
10. praised, criticized

Inferences

14. c
15. b
16. a
17. b

Implied Main Ideas and Central Points

18. a
19. c
20. a
21. 11
22. 2
23. 3

Supporting Details: Major and Minor

11. 3, three (2, 3, 5)
12. four (sentences 2, 3, 4, 5)
13. Topic: 3; Main Idea: 4; SD: 1,2

Practice exercises taken from: Townsend Press Learning Center:

<http://www.townsendpress.net/home.php>

Consulted Texts:

Groundwork for College Reading, 2008, John Langan

Ten Steps to Building College Reading Skills, 2005, John Langan

Ten Steps to Advancing College Reading Skills, 2004, John Langan

Online Reading Resources

- BBC: Learning English:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/index.shtml>
This section of the BBC website is geared towards nonnative English speakers. Current and past news articles with relevant vocabulary are offered.
- CNN News: <http://www.cnn.com/>
A website that offers headline news in areas such as politics, entertainment, travel, business, U.S. and domestic news.
- Gallaudet University:
<http://depts.gallaudet.edu/englishworks/exercises/main/reading.html>
This website offers reading practice along with exercises that focus on finding the main idea, inference, and details. Each reading passage includes an exercise for relevant vocabulary.
- Study Guides and Strategies: <http://www.studygs.net/>
This study skills website offers study skills and strategies for reading critically, speed and comprehension, reading essays and fiction, prereading material, reading difficult material, and more.
- Townsend Press Learning Center: <http://www.townsendpress.net/home.php>
This website offers online exercises to supplement *Groundwork for College Reading* and *Ten Steps to Building/Advancing/Improving College Reading*. Textbooks are not needed to do these lessons.
- Word Surfing: <http://www.wordsurfing.co.uk/20.html>