

INSTRUCTOR: "Reading for Topics and Main Ideas." A topic is what the passage is about. Find clues about the topic in words that occur in the title. From the titles, readers can infer that this article is about competent communication in cultural and relational contexts. They can then test that prediction by reading topic sentences.

These highlighted sentences are called topic sentences because they often announce what the paragraph is about. This passage focuses on the context of communication-- being socialized, culture, environment, communication, and relationships. Many topics are repeated or related.

Sometimes a topic isn't stated and repeated. Instead, the topic is implied. Readers can figure out the topic based on clues. By asking, what is this about, you can find stated or implied topics.

Once you know what a reading is about-- its topic-- you also need to figure out what is being said about that topic. The main idea is the writer's overall point. Like topics, main ideas are usually repeated and appear near the beginning or end of paragraphs.

In single paragraphs, the main idea and topic sentence are often the same. In essays with multiple paragraphs, the main idea of the whole essay is also called a thesis statement. It usually appears toward the end of the introduction.

By noting repeated words and the main idea for each paragraph in the margin, it's easy to tell that this passage is about how culture and relationships effect communication. Sometimes in paragraphs and in essays, the main idea isn't stated. Figure out the implied main idea by answering the question, what is the writer saying about this topic?

Remember, topics announce what the paragraph or essay is about. Main ideas announce what the writer is saying about that topic.