

ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION
ULAB1112

READING SKILLS

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Three Important Skills in Reading

Understanding Main Ideas

Guessing Meanings of Words

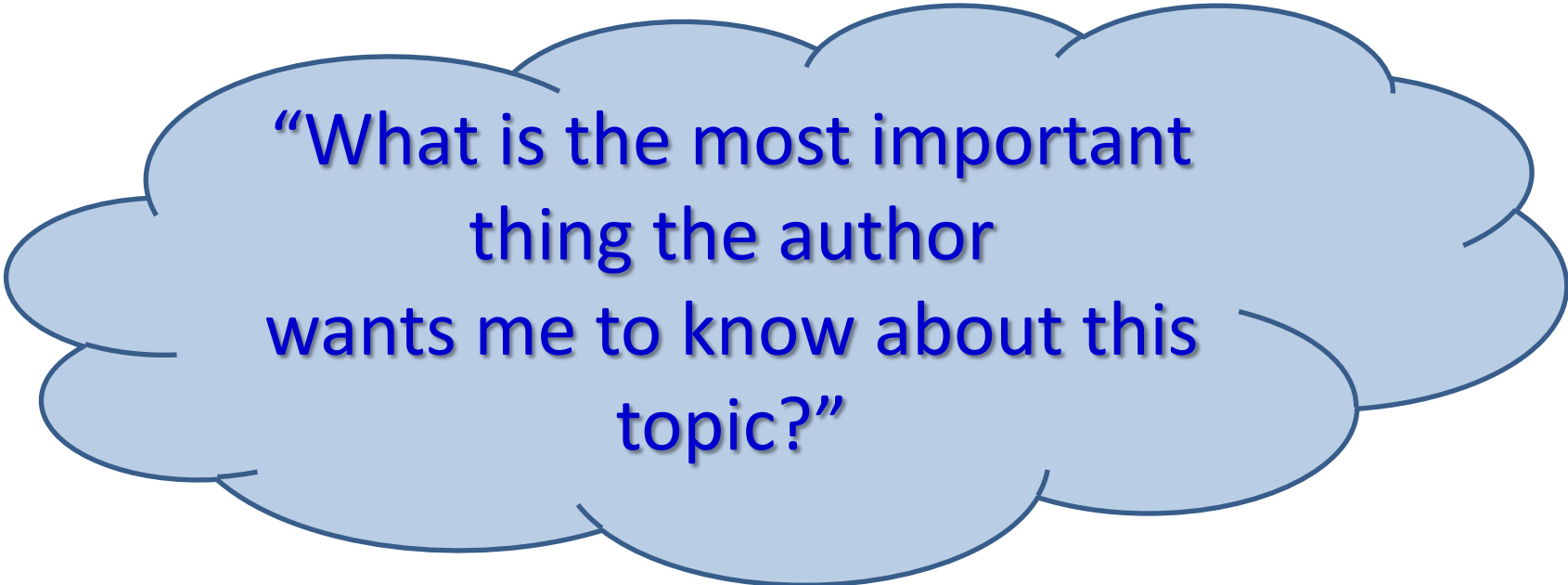
Making Inferences and Drawing Conclusions

Main Ideas

- A main idea is the central point that an author wants to make.
- It is the most important idea that is expressed by the author in his writing.
- By identifying main ideas it will help us understand what we read better

Understanding Main Ideas

To understand the main idea of a paragraph you need to ask yourself:



“What is the most important thing the author wants me to know about this topic?”

Types of Main Ideas

Stated Main Idea

- A main idea which is included in the topic sentence of the paragraph
- Can be found at the beginning, middle or end of a paragraph.

Unstated Main Idea

- Main idea is not stated anywhere in the paragraphs.
- Needs to be inferred by the reader

Finding Stated Main Ideas

- A good paragraph normally states the main idea either at the **beginning, middle or end.**
- To find the main idea, readers need to look for **the topic sentence of the paragraph.**
- The topic sentence will show the **scope and focus of the paragraph.**

Main Idea located at the **B**eginning

Holistic medicine is gaining popularity due to its natural properties. Ingredients such as fruits, leaves and essential oils are the main ingredients of holistic medicine. Besides, the preparation of holistic medicine uses less potentially harmful chemicals and additives. Since holistic medicine mainly uses naturally derived ingredients, people are convinced that it is safer to be used and has less side effects compared to modern medicine.

Main Idea located in the Middle

With the advancement of the communication technology, we are now able to communicate with people millions of miles away, buy products from our bedroom and order a meal online. Our tasks has become simpler, easier and faster with the use of the Internet. **It has a great impact on human society.** Thus, it should be used wisely so we can gain full benefit from this valuable invention.

Main Idea located at the End

‘You are what you eat’ is a common phrase we always hear about food. What we put in our bodies actually affects our overall health, energy and physique. If we always eat healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables and natural food, it will make us healthier. On the contrary, if we eat unhealthy food such as fast food, processed food and sugary food, it will make us ill. Hence, eating the right food can ensure our good health and positive well being.

Unstated Main Ideas

- Main ideas which are **not stated** are **embedded within the paragraph**.
- Thus readers need to **imply or guess the main idea** using the clues given in the text.
- To infer an unstated main idea we have to look at:
 - 1) **Repetition of ideas in the paragraph**
 - 2) **The most significant idea from the paragraph**

Example of Unstated Main Idea (1)

- Having the right work experience can kick-start a person's career. Whether it is a part-time work or industrial training, it can help guide employees in their first few years of employment. With some kind of work experience new employees can easily adapt themselves with their new workplace. Thus this eliminates the need for extra training and enhances productivity since the newly employed graduates are familiar with the working environment.
- **The main idea: the importance of having work experience in starting a new job**

Example of Unstated Main Idea (2)

- Almost everyone has a Facebook account since it is the most popular social networking site at the moment. Facebook lets people interact with their friends, find new acquaintances and reconnect with old classmates. Other interesting features of Facebook are the chat option, games and picture sharing elements. Since there are an abundance of activities that can be done on Facebook, it will continue to be the champion of social networking sites.
- **The main idea: reasons why Facebook is so popular**

Example of Unstated Main Idea (3)

- When we are inactive, our metabolism will become slower thus reducing our bodies' ability to burn calories. If we consume more calories than what our body needs, it will make us gain weight and become fat. The accumulation of fat in our bodies may cause us to have high cholesterol level in our blood which can lead to cardiovascular diseases such as heart disease, hypertension and diabetes. Contracting these types of diseases will decrease our quality of life thus it is important to stay active.
- **Main idea: consequence of not having an active life**

Meaning of Words in Context

- In our reading we might come across some words which we don't know the meaning.
- One of the most common method of **guessing unfamiliar words is by using contextual clues.**
- **Contextual clues are:** other words and sentences around the unfamiliar word that could help us guess the general meaning of the new word.

Contextual Clues

When using contextual clues to guess the meaning of a word you need to use:

- 1) Your understanding of the English grammar
- 2) The author's ideas and purpose of writing

By looking at the words, phrases, sentences surrounding the unfamiliar words you can guess the meaning of the unknown word.

Types of Contextual Clues

Direct Definition

- actual meaning of the word

Synonyms

- words with similar meaning

Antonyms

- words with opposite meaning

Direct Definition **Context Clues**

The definition of the unfamiliar word is normally provided after it is mentioned:

- He has an acute illness that will leave a **severe impact** on his life.
- Adlisa will have to make a grave decision, that will have a **serious effect** on her future career.
- The queer man was avoided in public since he was **unusually different**.

Synonyms Context Clues

Words with a similar meaning are also given to help readers guess the unknown word:

- The coy little girl was too shy to play with her new classmates.
- The student finished his assignment with great haste as the task needed to be completed fast.
- The delay of the construction works on the main road will continue to impede traffic.

Antonyms Context Clues

Sometimes words with opposite meanings are used as contextual clues:

- Unlike his **humble** son, the pompous man was detested by the public.
- Sarah tried to console her little brother who was **aggravated** by the unfortunate incident.
- If you are vague about the programme, the briefing will give you a **clear** understanding.

Guess the Underlined words using Contextual Clues in the Text

- When Jamal first contracted the disease, doctors were perplexed at the rapid pace the disease was spreading all over his body. Fearing the disease would plague the entire community, Jamal was ordered to live in exile to prevent the widespread of the new-found disease. Being forced to live away from society he fell into depression as his future seemed bleak since he cannot make contact with other people. This was until scientists discovered a potential cure for his bizarre illness so there is still hope for Jamal to lead a normal life.

Meanings of the Underlined words

- When Jamal first contracted the disease, doctors were perplexed at the rapid pace the disease was spreading all over his body. Fearing the disease would plague the entire community, Jamal was ordered to live in exile to prevent the widespread of the new-found disease. Being forced to live away from society he fell into depression as his future seemed bleak since he cannot make contact with other people. This was until scientists discovered a potential cure for his bizarre illness so there is still hope for Jamal to lead a normal life.
- Perplexed could mean surprised/
puzzled
- Plague- affect/
afflict
- Exile- away
from society
- Bleak- hopeless
- Bizarre -
unusual



Making Inferences and Drawing Conclusions

- Writers can mean more than what they write
- We need to make inferences and draw conclusions to fully understand the underlying message
- Making inferences involved **linking the information in a text to form an opinion or idea**
- Drawing a conclusion is **summarizing what have been read**

Steps to make inferences and draw conclusions

Look for clues, patterns, and relationships



List your background knowledge of the topic



Use all the information gathered to make inferences and draw conclusions

Making Inferences & Drawing Conclusions (1)

It was late at night, there were broken glass on the ground and the police was questioning a man and a woman.

- **Facts:** night, broken glass, police
- **Knowledge:** broken glass could be from a window, police handles crimes
- **Conclusion:** A burglary/ crime has been committed and the police is questioning the witnesses.

Making Inferences & Drawing Conclusions (2)

The music stopped, the woman bowed and everyone applauded and gave her a standing ovation.

- **Facts:** music, a woman bowed, applause
- **Knowledge:** music is normally played in a concert, crowd applause a good performance.
- **Conclusion:** A famous singer has completed an amazing performance.

Making Inferences & Drawing Conclusions (3)

There was milk on the floor, the little boy was crying and his mother was standing over him.

- **Facts:** milk on floor, boy is crying, mother
- **Knowledge:** milk was probably spilt, the mother may have caused the boy to cry
- **Conclusion:** The little boy spilt the milk and his mother has scolded him.

Drawing Conclusions form a Text (1)

- First impression can either make or break a relationship. The first impression that you make when meeting new people will influence how they will think of you and consequently how they will act towards you. If you are confident and act positively when meeting a new person he or she will find you pleasant and will be happy to meet you. On the contrary, if you are cold or aggressive when meeting someone new, he or she might avoid from interacting with you. Normally first impressions will have a lasting effect and will be quite difficult to change.
- **Conclusion: It is wise to make a positive first impression whenever meeting someone new.**

Drawing Conclusions form a Text (2)

- Practise what you preach is normally said to people who give advice but they themselves do not follow it. Everyone likes to give advice in any situations, but it is really difficult for people to listen to something that has not been proven to work. For example, when comparing a father who smokes advising his son not to smoke because it is dangerous with a father who does not smoke advising his son not to smoke, which son will listen to his father's advice? It is clear that the son with the non-smoking father will follow his father's advice because his father is setting a good example by walking his talk.
- **Conclusion: It is better to set a good example than to only give advice since actions speak louder than words.**

Drawing Conclusions form a Text (3)

- Beauty is in the eye of the beholder so what actually defines beauty? The media seems to be the main reference for beauty since it shows good looking actors in movies and beautiful models in advertisements. However, the beauty in the media is only a distorted image of real beauty, since images in the media can be altered. Many people are fooled by the media into believing that it is displaying true attainable beauty and some will even go to extreme lengths to get their ideal look. Since the level of beauty is judged by the media, some people are pressured to look like their idols and may hurt themselves in the process.
- **Conclusion: Our perception of beauty greatly depends on the media.**

Bibliography

- Azian Abdul Aziz et.al. (2006). *English for Academic Communication*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Mc Graw Hill.