

**EVALUATING
ACADEMIC READINESS
FOR APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING**

Revised for

ACCESS TO APPRENTICESHIP

**COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS
IDENTIFICATION OF MAIN IDEA**

**AN ACADEMIC SKILLS MANUAL
for**

The Food Preparation Trades

This trade group includes the following trades:

Baker & Cook, and
Retail Meat Cutter

*Workplace Support Services Branch
Ontario Ministry of Education and Training*

Revised 2011

In preparing these Academic Skills Manuals, we have used passages, diagrams and questions similar to those an apprentice might find in a text, guide or trade manual.

This trade related material is not intended to instruct you in your trade. It is used only to demonstrate how understanding an academic skill will help you find and use the information you need.

COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS

MAIN IDEA

*An academic skill required for the study of the
Food Preparation Trades*

INTRODUCTION

The *main idea* of anything is its central purpose or point. The main idea of serving a meal is to properly and efficiently prepare, cook and present all the ingredients so that the finished project is attractive, delicious and safe. Everyone who is part of the food preparation team is there to contribute his or her expertise to that main idea.

As you learn your trade, you will learn many skills through reading technical textbooks and manuals. Identifying the main idea as you examine written material and as you watch a technique being demonstrated will help you sort through information. Then you can find what you want, and focus on the exact part of the text that contains the ideas or facts that you need. Just as knives, pans, refrigerators, ovens, and workplace safety are each necessary parts to the food preparation trades, the ability to understand main ideas is an essential part of your reading strategies toolbox.

The practical applications of understanding main ideas include reading and understanding food preparation textbooks, instructions for using tools, industry regulations and safety manuals. Note taking and study skills are also enhanced by the ability to master this skill.

This manual will help you identify the main idea in technical material so that you can recognize what is important. We will look at how technical material is organized and suggest ways to find the main idea in that material. We will look at the following:

- ◆ Titles, headings and short descriptions as guides to the main idea.
- ◆ Focusing on the main idea
- ◆ Topic sentences and topic paragraphs
- ◆ Supports to the main idea
- ◆ An approach to reading

PART I

TITLES, HEADINGS AND DESCRIPTIONS AS GUIDES TO THE MAIN IDEA

Organization of technical material

Technical material usually gets you to the main idea quickly in the following ways:

- ◆ Titles, headings and short descriptions indicate the main ideas of each section.
- ◆ Information is grouped in a logical pattern by topic, chapter, section, and paragraph.

- ◆ The introduction to the topic usually comes near the beginning, so you get to the main idea and the purpose of the writing immediately.
- ◆ Individual chapters usually start with basic concepts and move to knowledge that is more detailed after the general introduction to the main idea.

Titles: Finding The Main Idea

When you need to read technical material, start by looking at the document title or name. The title will give you a good general idea of what the material covers.

Example: When you open a drawer labeled *knives*, you expect to find knives. The label tells you what's inside. Everything in the drawer should be a knife – from paring knives to chef knives. If the label says, *spoons*, everything inside should be a spoon. The label provides an idea of what's there – and what's not there – but it doesn't give you details.

Titles, headings and sub-headings

Think of a textbook, manual, chapter, or paragraph as a drawer. A drawer can store equipment and supplies, while a textbook or manual stores information. This information is labeled with **titles**, **headings** and **sub-headings** so you know what's inside.

Here are headings you might find in a trade manual:

Fruits
Citrus Fruits
Selecting Citrus Fruits

Each heading tells what the different sections are about. The first heading, **Fruits**, is a general heading - there could be information about anything to do with fruit. It could be buying, cooking or peeling fruit. But, we do know that something about fruit will be the main idea of this section.

The second heading, **Citrus Fruits**, gives more information. This heading is more specific. You know the type of fruit you will read about, but not anything more.

The third heading, **Selecting Citrus Fruits**, is even more specific. You know the type of fruit, and you know that the reading will tell you something about how to choose this fruit. This is the main idea.

Usually titles or headings illustrate how the material in a text is organized. It starts with general topics and moves to ones that are more specific. The main idea of each section becomes more focused.

Here are two more examples:

Preparation
Retaining Nutrients in Preparation

The first heading gives you a large topic. Compare it to the second heading and notice how the second is more specific. It defines and limits the topic to a specific concern in food preparation, giving you a more precise idea of what you'll find.

Titles and headings are placed at the top of the reading with **bold print** or CAPITAL LETTERS so they're easy to see. Charts and diagrams also have titles, and, often, short descriptions at the bottom or top. Titles give you visual cues that are easy to see and that direct you to the main idea.

A **heading** is a form of title designed to break information into smaller divisions. A **sub-heading** breaks into even smaller divisions; a sub, sub-heading is smaller again. Often, a new heading will signal when there is a change in main idea. It will direct you to the next main idea. Always read the titles. They won't help if you skip them.

You will find a list of titles and section headings in the **Table of Contents** at the beginning of each text or manual. Be sure to check the Table of Contents before you start searching for information.

Here is an example of a Table of Contents you might see in a trade manual or text. Look at how information is broken into more and more specific topics.

THE FOOD SERVICE INDUSTRY	Textbook title
Careers	Chapter title
Organizing the Kitchen	Unit heading
Traditional positions	Sub-headings
Non-traditional positions	

Let's look more closely at how information is organized in this Table of Contents. The same ideas of organization will apply to all texts, manuals or diagrams. Consider these four points about titles and headings:

One

Observe how much information you get about **main ideas from the titles**.

- The textbook title tells you the kind of information you will find – information about the food service industry
- The chapter title **Careers** lets you know what this chapter will cover.
- Under the chapter title, you see unit headings and sub-headings. Each title tells you what aspect of food service careers you will learn about.

Two

Each heading is a new main idea, but each one **stays on the main topic**:

- **The Food Service Industry**, the title of the book, is the main topic of the text.
- **Careers**, the title of a chapter, is a new main idea but it is closely related to the main topic – the food service industry.

Remember, all the information you read will relate to the larger main idea – the food service industry, and all the information in a chapter will relate to the main idea of that chapter.

Three

As you read titles, from the textbook title down to the sub (and sub, sub) headings, you can see that topics *are more narrowly defined*. At each smaller heading, the topic covers a more limited or exact aspect of the main idea.

- The textbook title gives you a general, large main idea – the food service industry.
- The chapter title gives you a more specific topic - careers in the food service industry.
- Unit headings give an even more detailed main idea - organizing the kitchen.
- Sub-headings divide that main idea into two still more specific groupings (traditional and non- traditional careers in kitchens).

By reading the titles and headings, you know quite a bit about what to expect in this chapter. It should all tie together.

Four

When you read titles, you can see the *order of the information*. When learning a trade, you need to start at the beginning and learn information step-by-step.

- The first chapter, the first textbook, the first manual are the foundation for the second chapter, second textbook and so on.
- The chapter heading list the order in which you will learn individual topics.

This order shows you both where you are going and the steps you will take to get there.

In Brief

1. **Titles** indicate what you will read about.
 - Everything in this book will be about the main idea – the food service industry
2. **Chapter headings** identify the parts that form the main idea and show the order in which those parts are presented.
 - Every chapter will be about some part of the food service industry – careers, general safety and so on.
3. **Headings and sub headings** will identify information contained in the chapter.
 - All of the headings in the chapter on careers will tell about specifics aspects of careers in the food industry.

PART II

FOCUSING ON THE MAIN IDEA

Assessing a job

When you have a job or task to do, you need to be clear about it. “What is the job? How big is it? How long will it take? What problems can I foresee?” These are main idea questions.

You need to do the same thing with reading assignments. Ask main idea questions: “What do I have to understand? What am I expected to do at the end? How long will this take?” Then look at the main titles and headings to find out where to start reading.

The visual check

The *visual check* is a preview of what you are going to read. Looking through a textbook before reading it will help you find information quickly. It provides an overall assessment of the reading

material before you begin tackling it. If you are given a reading assignment in class, look over the book first. These guides will help you identify the main idea:

- The chapter, titles, and headings show how the information is organized.
 - Next, look for the chapter heading that refers to the reading you need to do.
- When you find the heading you want, flip through the book to that section.
 - Notice how long the passage is and if it is divided into smaller divisions.
- Note the diagrams and read information around them.
 - If the information is new learning, and if it looks complicated, you might give yourself more time to spend on it.

Seeing A Pattern

Every document follows a pattern of organization. Information is typically developed from general, large topics to more specific ones as details are added to the main idea. Watch for the pattern, so you understand where you are going and how you are getting there. When you recognize the pattern that a text or manual follows, you will have a pretty good idea of where to look for specific information in the document.

The organization of information will follow one of the following patterns:

- ◆ general to specific,
- ◆ most important to less important or vice versa,
- ◆ problem to solution, or
- ◆ theory to application.

You will see other patterns too. You may learn why a procedure is important before you learn the steps, or you may learn the importance of each step as you go. Recognize the pattern and then focus on finding the information you need.

From main idea to details

Titles and headings give you a general idea of what you'll find but they don't give details. A drawer labeled *Kitchen Tools* contains tools but doesn't say how many or what kind. Open the drawer; look at the contents. Take out each tool, or dump them all out. Now, you are getting the details.

Keep focused on the main idea

To get the details of a section of reading material, first do a visual check. After the visual check, read the material, paying attention to what it is telling you. If the material is complicated or new, you may need to split it into smaller portions. It helps to read a difficult part several times.

While you have to pay attention to both the main ideas and all the details that explain it, don't get distracted from the main job by concentrating too much on a detail.

Example: You are organizing your knives (main job) and find a cleaver you lost six months ago; you pick it up, show it to the worker beside you, and wonder how it got here. You have been distracted by a detail from the job you are suppose to be doing.

The same thing happens with reading – you can be sidetracked. Use Passage 1, below, to find the main idea. Use the three steps below to guide you.

1. **Use the title** as a guide to the main idea and contents.
2. **Do a visual check** to look for headings, diagrams and length. Note anything that stands out such as large or bold print. This gives you some clues to the main idea.
3. **Read the passage.** Check the way that each sentence relates to the main idea.

Passage 1 **Nutrients**

Providing high quality nutrients in food service is an important consideration in the food service industry. The aim is to conserve nutrients and allow the flavour of the food to be the strongest selling feature. As customers change their demands, the cook will recognize these changes and adapt their foods accordingly.

One change is in a greater demand for fresh vegetables and fruits, for meals with more fibre and complex carbohydrates. This change satisfies a demand for high quality nutrients; it also means a reduced demand for foods that are high in fats, sugars and salts. These changes will affect the menu planning for today's chefs. It will also affect the way food is prepared and handled. The attention is on preserving the best nutrients. The chef may adapt menu planning in several ways: altering the *ingredients*, the *quantities* that are prepared and the *cooking methods* that best conserve flavour and nutritional values. The chef may also adapt traditional recipes by modifying ingredients, portions of servings and cooking methods.

Before answering the questions about main idea, we'll review the passage using the three steps.

Step 1: Use titles and headings as keys to the main idea.

- The title gives you a guide to the main idea – nutrients.
- You don't know yet exactly what the information is about.

Step 2: Do a visual check before you tackle the reading.

- The passage is two paragraphs long.
- Some words are in *italics*.
- There are no pictures or diagrams.

Step 3: Read the passage carefully.

- ◆ You see that each sentence refers to or describes something about the main idea – nutrients in food.
- ◆ Each sentence contains details that relate to the main idea.

When you reach step 3, you are looking for details that relate to the main idea. You open the drawer and study the contents.

Answer questions 1 and 2 below. Answers are at the end of this skills manual.

Questions

- 1 a) In paragraph one, what is the main idea?
- 2 a). What is the main idea in paragraph two?
b) Give details from paragraph two that support the paragraph's main idea.

Once you have found the main idea, the details will answer *what, how, why, when* types of questions. You also expect to find out how all of this information relates to you and your trade.

What's it about?

Each sentence in Passage 1 relates to the title and topic of nutrients; you have confirmed that this is the main idea. You have kept your focus on the main idea. By going through the process of identifying the main idea of each paragraph, you could now to tell another person what this passage is about. You can also separate the main idea from the details.

Apply this method to find the main idea in anything you read, whether it's for yourself or to explain a preparation method, industry regulations, care of equipment, or to develop a menu with a customer.

PART III

TOPIC SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS

In technical material, the topic sentence (usually the first sentence) tells you what the main idea is. The other sentences add to this idea. All of the sentences should have something to do with the main idea. Once you are sure about the main idea expressed in the topic sentence, **read the passage carefully**. Then ask yourself what it's about. The *usual rule* can help you find the topic sentence, *and* the main idea.

The Usual Rule:

1. Paragraphs and passages are set up with a key sentence called a topic sentence.
2. This topic sentence is usually the first one in the paragraph.
3. Topic sentences provide you with the main idea.

In Passage 1, **Nutrients**, each first sentence is a topic sentence.

Paragraph one: Providing high quality nutrients in food service is an important consideration in the food service industry.

Paragraph two: One change is in greater demand for fresh vegetables and fruits and for meals with more fibre and complex carbohydrates.

These topic sentences prepare us for information to come. They say, "This is what we are going to talk about." The remaining sentences explain or add details to the main ideas.

These topic sentences prepare us for information to come. They say, “This is what we are going to talk about.” All the remaining sentences explain or add details to the main ideas.

Below are two opening sentences that show how topic sentences work. These will be the topic sentences in passages 2 and 3, which we will see later. We can expect that anything that follows in the passages should relate to the ideas in these topic sentences.

Read the topic sentences carefully and answer the questions which follow, even though you haven’t seen the rest of the paragraphs yet.

from Passage 2

Learn as much as you can about the flesh of tuna and other fish so that you can choose the best cooking technique.

from Passage 3

It’s unlikely that you will get a chance to inspect produce until it arrives at the restaurant, so to guarantee the best quality, buy according to grade.

Questions

1. What is the main idea?

from Passage 2

- a) learning about fish
- b) cooking techniques
- c) the flesh of fish

from Passage 3

- a) buying by grade
- b) checking produce
- c) produce in a restaurant

Before you check the answers at the end of this skill manual, read Passages 2 and 3, below. Do you need to change your answers? Do the first sentences work as the topic sentences? Why or why not?

Passage 2

Learn as much as you can about the flesh of tuna and other fish so that you can choose the best cooking technique. Tuna flesh separates more easily than that of swordfish and it has a unique flavour. It has a pinkish-beige colour ranging to dark maroon. Tuna can be roasted or grilled; as a canned product, it is packed as albacore or light meat.

Passage 3

It’s unlikely that you will get a chance to inspect produce until it arrives at the restaurant, so to guarantee the best quality, buy according to grade. Grade A is the highest grade. Grades below this can be used for baking or for sauces as the appearance will not affect flavour. Some standards for grading may vary, so you need to keep yourself informed about grading as you move from province to province or country to country.

Does the *Usual Rule* apply? **Yes**, these work as topic sentences:

- They give the main idea and the other sentences build information from that idea.
- They present a logical order in which to develop information on oxides in metal.

NOTE: *If you aren't sure about the main idea after reading the first sentence in a passage, go on to the second or third sentence. The main idea and direction of the passage should become clearer as you proceed. One idea or topic should emerge as the main idea.*

Topic Paragraphs

Longer passages begin with a **topic paragraph**. They act like topic sentences. They will tell you what the whole passage or section is going to be about. Watch for introductory paragraphs that prepare you for a large piece of information. They come first, are often short and give you main idea and purpose of what you are going to read.

In Brief:

1. Titles and headings give you information about the contents. They tell you what the textbook or passage is about, in other words, what the main idea is.
2. The next step is visual; you can “see” what to expect, and where the information fits in with the rest of the material.
3. When you read each paragraph, identify the topic sentence, which gives the main idea of that paragraph.
 - The other sentences should add information or details to the main idea.
4. Identify the topic paragraph when you read a chapter or a longer section.
 - The other paragraphs should add information to the main idea.

PART V

SUPPORTS TO THE MAIN IDEA

Supports to the main idea are the details that provide specific information. Supports may do any of the following:

- ◆ define or explain the main idea,
- ◆ describe how it works,
- ◆ illustrate how it operates,
- ◆ show the steps, or,
- ◆ show the result of something.

Identifying Supports To The Main Idea

Read Passage 4. See if the main idea is placed first – and what it is. Do the supports follow with details about the main idea?

Passage 4

Pastas and Dumplings

The preparation of pastas and dumplings is from a dough (or batter) with a starchy ingredient and a liquid. A starchy ingredient could be flour, meal or potatoes. Ingredients added to this dough will change the shape, colour, flavour and texture of the pasta or dumpling.

The basic fresh pasta recipe produces a stiff dough that can be stretched, rolled into thin sheets and cut into different shapes. If the ratio of flour to liquid is changed, or if other ingredients are introduced into the basic formula, the result will be a dough (or batter) that is handled and cooked in a different way from fresh. For example, an increase in the amount of liquid in the dough will yield a soft batter used for spätzli dumplings. A leavener added to the dough produces a soft batter that could be used for larger dumplings.

We should find the topic sentence in the first paragraph. It should give the main idea and prepares us for supports to the main idea. The supports might define or expand the main idea. They will describe a method, illustrate with diagrams or photos, or provide examples. Let's look at paragraph one to see if it works this way.

Paragraph one

Sentence one states: "*The preparation of pastas and dumplings is from a dough (or batter) with a starchy ingredient and a liquid*". The main idea is the preparation of pastas and dumplings. The next two sentences support this topic with related detail: we learn what a starchy ingredient is, and what happens if other ingredients are added. The **main idea** is followed by **supports**.

Paragraph two

In paragraph two, the first sentence states: "*The basic fresh pasta recipe produces a stiff dough that can be stretched, rolled into thin sheets and cut into different shapes.*" The main idea is about the recipe for fresh pasta. Each of the sentences that follow adds information *to this topic*.

We learn:

- about changes to the fresh pasta recipe
- ratio of flour to liquid
- the effects when other ingredients are introduced
- an example: increase of liquid gives soft batter for spätzli,
- an example: adding a leavener gives a soft batter for larger dumplings

Each is a supporting detail; each increases the information and your knowledge about the main idea - the basic fresh pasta recipe and the preparation of pastas and dumplings.

This passage about pastas and dumplings shows a common pattern used in technical writing.

1. The **title** communicates the topic in brief.
2. The **topic sentence or paragraph** communicates the main idea in expanded form.
3. The sentences that follow add details.

Steps To Supports

Narrowing in on the supports to the main idea is like starting a job.

1. First, you need to ask main idea questions:
 - a. What is the task (the job or the reading)?
 - b. How long will it take?
 - c. Where is it located?

2. Next you need to look more closely at the details and ask specific questions:
 - a. **What** manuals do I use?
 - b. **What** procedures and materials do I use?
 - c. **What** order will I use for the project and **why**?
3. Proceed carefully.
 - a. Stay focused on the purpose of the task.
 - b. Make sure that each part helps to accomplish the main purpose.

Getting the information you want

Getting what you want, whether you are reading for information or doing a job involves seeing the big picture and then narrowing in on details. In this way you become knowledgeable, and you can make informed decisions. If you use this approach when you read for your trade, you will get the information you need to understand an aspect of your trade.

In Brief: The Three Steps

Step 1: See the big picture: Look at the title.

Step 2: Get a better focus: Use the visual check to preview the reading.

Step 3: Look more closely: Read for details.

Types of Supports

When you recognize the type of support being used, it should help you find what you want quickly. Supports to the main idea include but are not limited to the following:

1. **Examples:** Examples take you from what you know to new knowledge. They give you a clearer picture of what something is or what it includes or how it works. The passage usually signals an example.

In the example below, the words *such as* tell us that turnips and carrots are examples of *dense* vegetables.

Example: How much water you use varies according to a number of factors. For example, dense vegetables such as turnips or carrots require more water than say spinach.

Examples will clarify and add to your knowledge.

2. **Order of Ideas:** Order of ideas (sequence) describes the relationship between the parts or steps in a piece of information or a process. It is a common type of organization used in technical materials. Usually technical information is presented first in a general introduction and is followed by more specific details. The opening or introduction may outline the content, the application and the importance of the information. Read it carefully before the steps are outlined.

Example: Use large and mature potatoes as these contain more starch. If some potatoes do not puff, put them aside, store and use for French fries.

Directions and instructions will start with the first step. Look for numbers or letters. Also look for lists or steps. Look for words such as *to begin with*, *first...second*, *then/next*, *before...after*, *in the same way*, *finally*. Remember, there is a reason for the order even if you don't know what it is.

3. **Definitions:** If the topic introduces a new concept or a technical word, you need an explanation of what it is before you know what it does. Technical terms are defined so you can understand the new word. Take note of special print or marks that are designed to get your attention.

The definition may be in parentheses and/or italics (*italics look like this*).

Example: Make a variety of dice sizes, from *brunoise* (a fine dice) to a large dice.

The definition may state what something is or what it does.

Example: *Zest* is the outer portion of the peel of a citrus fruit. It is used for colour and flavour.

Look for definitions and make notes. These are the words of your trade and you need to make them part of your trade vocabulary.

4. **Comparison and Contrast:** Comparisons show similarities and differences while contrasts show differences only. Look for words such as *in contrast*, *some ... others*, *whereas*, *yet*, *on the other hand*. This is done to help explain, define and expand your knowledge of relationships.

Example: Dried pasta, on the other hand, can be stored for long periods of time.

This example works to build information through opposites. If dried pasta can be stored for long periods of time, then *fresh pasta* can only be stored for *short* periods of time.

Example: You will discover a number of differences between vanilla sauces. Some include whole milk, others include heavy or light cream.

When products, formulas, recipes, ingredients etc. are being compared, it's indicating that you need to learn these similarities and differences.

5. **Cause and Effect:** Cause and effect explains relationships. What effect does vigorous beating have on whipping cream? Why didn't my sauce thicken? Can I take steps to prevent it from happening next time? Look for supports that explain the relationship between cause and effect.

Example: Heating a sauce over too high heat will cause it to curdle instead of thickening.

An understanding of cause and effect gives you the tools to explain a procedure, product, or principle to a customer. Look for signal words and phrases like *because*, and *if... then* that signal a cause and effect explanation.

Example: If the sauce does not simmer long enough, an acid taste will remain.

PART V

AN APPROACH TO READING

Know What You Want

What you want from a reading affects how you approach it. If you know exactly what you need, you might go over the contents quickly until you come to the information you want. Then you should carefully examine the details concerning the topic.

You may need instructions about using a particular machine, an explanation of how to properly care for your knives, or the details about baking French pastry. If you are reading for a specific reason, you look for information related to your aim and pay less attention to details that don't seem related. This is a logical and economical approach to reading for a purpose. Below are some suggestions for getting what you need from a reading:

- ◆ Make notes while you read, detailing the main points.
- ◆ Use your own words to repeat what you have read.
- ◆ Try stating the main idea.
- ◆ Give the passage a title.
- ◆ Can you tell someone else what the passage is about in a few words? If you can, you've identified the main idea.

To understand a passage, you need to know its main idea and its details. You should be able to say, "This shows how to test for freshness", or "This explains a grading system". If you can't, you know you need to reread the passage to find the main idea. Then look again at what supports do. They relate to the main idea but they also add details to our understanding.

Troubleshooting The System **(Getting lost - and found again)**

You think you have a clear sense of the main idea. You know what it's about. But, as you get further into this technical material, you start feeling lost.

Check:

- *Maybe you weren't on the main trail at all.* If the sentences don't seem on topic, rethink the main idea.
- *Maybe the paragraph doesn't have a clear topic sentence.* You can still find the main idea by looking at what all the sentences are about. Try to identify one word or phrase that seems to be the theme of the paragraph and develop the main idea from this.
- *Maybe, you're on the main trail but have strayed a little bit off it.* Again, this will send you back to the beginning. As you go back through the sentences, you may find a

confusing part and realize, “Here's the spot that baffles me.” You can identify the main idea, but a sentence or area of a chart contains details that you don't understand.

If you get the main idea but need to clarify some of the details, the first step is to identify the problem. Is it new vocabulary or words used in unfamiliar ways, technical terminology, or a math formula?

Begin to solve the problem:

1. Can you look up the new words?
2. Can you find a technical definition?
3. Should you get extra help with the math?

Sometimes a writer assumes you know a concept or theory and has left it out. This makes your job tough. You may need help from an instructor, a different textbook or another student. Remember, if you can find the problem, you can fix it.

Read aloud

If you are stumped by a passage, try reading it out loud. Sometimes you discover that you have been reading one word wrong the whole time. Reading aloud may help you solve the puzzle. Sometimes, you can “hear” a problem better than you can “see” where a problem exists.

Complex passages

The main idea may jump out at you in short, familiar readings. In complex paragraphs with a lot of detail, math formulas and technical information, you may find the main idea buried. Read the section in pieces, ask questions as you go, underline and make notes. You might need to read parts of the passage several times to understand how the details relate to the main idea.

Application

Here is a passage that you might read in your trade. We have removed the heading above the passage to challenge you to come up with one. Follow these instructions:

1. Find a topic sentence that gives the main idea of paragraphs one and two. Ask yourself if all the sentences relate to this main idea.
2. Choose a title or heading.

Suggestions for answers to title and main idea are at the end of this skills manual.

Passage 4

? _____ ?

Fats include both solid fats and liquid oils. When measuring solid fats in a measuring cup, be sure that the fat is pushed down into the bottom of the cup. Leaving spaces in the bottom will mean that the measurement is inaccurate and this will affect the finished product.

The *displacement method* of measuring will give you the accuracy you require. This method works in the following way. Fill a measuring cup with one cup of cold water and add the fat until it reaches the

measure that you want, for example, the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mark on the cup. When you drain the water, the amount of fat in the cup will be $\frac{1}{2}$ cups.

Your test of understanding is the ability to explain something to someone else. Where do you start? Start with the main idea.

Example: Imagine you have to explain the principles of proper food storage. You start with the main idea.

1. **The main idea:**

- For safety reasons all food must be stored at correct temperatures
- It must also be stored in correct position relative to other foods stored in the same area.

2. **The details** will include a variety of information including:

- what the safety factors are,
- the concept of “first in – first out”, and
- correct placement and storage temperatures of different food items in the storage units – pantries, refrigerators, freezer.

Just as a writer chooses details to support the main idea and purpose, so do you. You can explain this – or anything else – by starting with the main idea and working through the details. You will use definitions, examples, comparison, and cause and effect details that relate to the situation. You will be practicing your skills and demonstrating your expertise.

CONCLUSION

As you read ask yourself, "What is this about?" If you can answer the question, you understand the main idea. If you can't answer it, go back and follow the steps to identify the main idea.

Build your skills from the base up. As you move to more difficult concepts, either in reading or in the complexity of a job, the skill of separating the main idea from the details still holds. The goal will remain the same: understanding the main task and all the details necessary to get you to a successful completion.

Work to understand how the details relate to the main idea. This may take longer, but if as a result, you get the effects you want, the time will be well spent. When you understand the purpose of a passage, you find what you need, and, most importantly, find what you are supposed to learn.

Summary

1. **Notice how your trade / technical material is organized.** Do a visual check of the passage for length, for highlighted information and diagrams. Look for the patterns.
2. **Focus on the main idea when you start reading.** Identify the main idea through the title, the topic sentence, and find the supporting details that expand the main idea.
3. **Use the supporting details** to help you sort out the main idea. The supporting details answer questions such as how, what, why, where, when, and in what order.
4. **Understand the types of details** found in technical writing. The supporting details give examples, order (sequence) of steps or ideas, definitions, comparisons and contrasts, and causes and effects.
5. **Use an organized approach** to reading. Understand why you are reading so that you focus on the details you need. Make sure you also find what you are required to learn.
2.
6. **Translate what you have read into your own words** as though you were explaining it to someone else. Work from the main idea through to the details.
7. **If you get lost, stop.** Find out where you got lost and try to identify the problem: Is it main idea, technical vocabulary, a math formula?
3.
8. **Accept that picking out supports to the main idea and listing information takes longer than just reading.** The results – identifying, finding and understanding the information you read – are essential to your trade success.

ANSWERS

Part II, Passage 1 Nutrients

1. In paragraph one, the main idea is stated in the first sentence – the importance of providing high quality nutrients in the food service industry.
2. a) Paragraph two is about the greater demand for high quality nutrients.
b) The paragraph includes details about the following:
 - which nutrients customers are concerned about – *a greater demand for fresh vegetables and fruits, for meals with more fibre and complex carbohydrates and a reduced demand for foods which are high in fats, sugars and salts*
 - how these demands will affect chefs – menu planning and food preparation and handling
 - how the chef can adapt – by altering ingredients, quantities, cooking methods, recipes and portions.

Part III, Passage 2 and 3

Passage 2

1. c) the flesh of fish

Passage 3

2. a) buying by grade

Part V, Passage 4

1. The second sentence, “When measuring solid fats in a measuring cup, be sure that the fat is pushed down into the bottom of the cup,” tells us the main idea of paragraph one is measuring solid fats.

The sentence, “The *displacement method* of measuring will give you the accuracy you require,” is the topic sentence of paragraph two.

2. A good title is **Measuring Solid Fats**.