

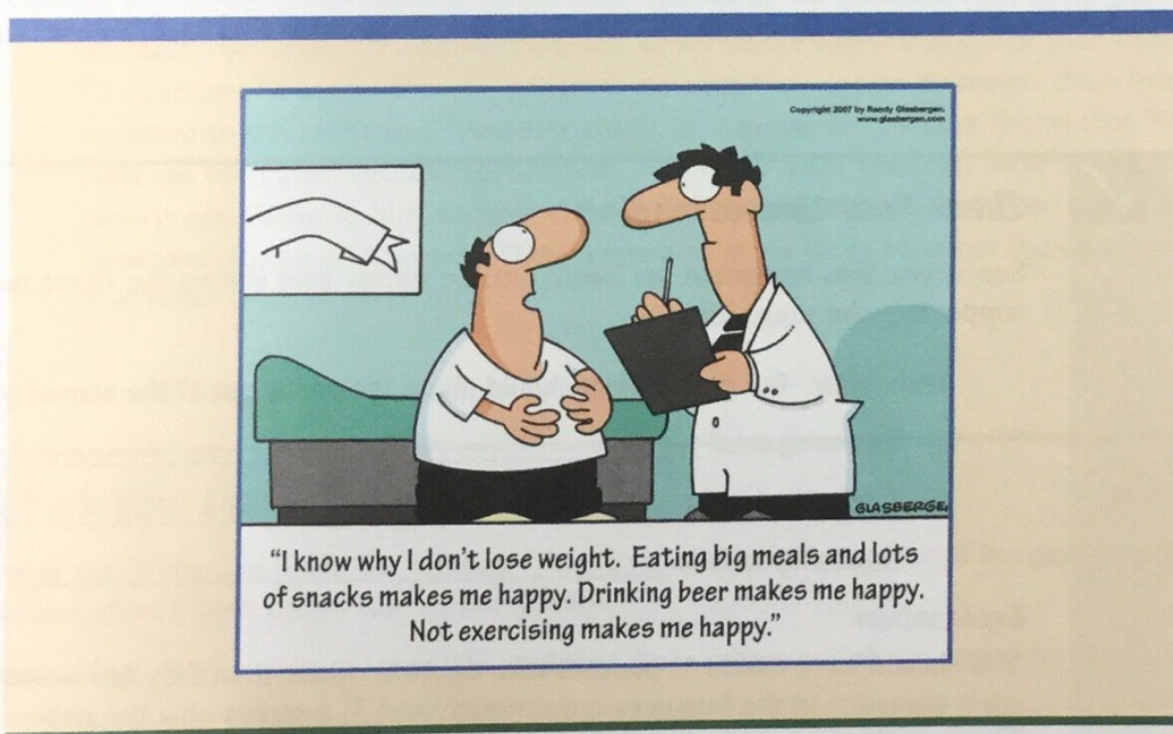
3

Supporting Details

In Chapter 2 you worked on the most important reading skill—finding the main idea. A closely related reading skill is locating *supporting details*—the added information that is needed for you to make sense of a main idea.

This chapter describes supporting details and presents three techniques that will help you take study notes on main ideas and their supporting details: outlining, mapping, and summarizing.

What Are Supporting Details?



Supporting details are reasons, examples, facts, steps, or other kinds of evidence that explain a main idea. In the cartoon shown above, the main idea is that “I know why I don’t lose weight.” The joke in the cartoon is that the man’s supporting details—big meals, snacks, beer, and not exercising—may make him *happy*, but they don’t make him *healthy*.

On the next page is a paragraph with strong support for its point.

A Paragraph with Strong Support

In the paragraph below, three major details support the main idea that the penny should be phased out of our economy. As you read the paragraph, try to identify and check (✓) the three major details.

¹"A penny saved is a penny earned," the old saying goes. ²But there are now good reasons for our government to phase the penny out of the economy, allowing the nickel to stand as the lowest-valued coin. ³For one thing, pennies take up more space than they are worth. ⁴We can all recall a time when we needed a nickel, dime, or quarter to make an important phone call, buy a vending machine snack, or make a photocopy, and all we could come up with was a fistful of useless pennies. ⁵Pennies are also a nuisance to the business community. ⁶According to the National Association of Convenience Stores, 5.5 million hours and 22 million dollars are wasted by businesses on the extra time and effort it takes to handle pennies. ⁷Finally, keeping pennies in circulation costs the nation as a whole. ⁸The manufacturing, storage, and handling expenses involved in a penny's production and distribution add up to considerably more than the one cent it is worth.



Check Your Understanding

See if you can complete the basic outline below that shows the three major details supporting the main idea.

Main idea: Our government should phase the penny out of the economy.

Supporting detail 1: _____

Supporting detail 2: _____

Supporting detail 3: _____

Explanation

You should have added 1) pennies take up more space than they are worth; 2) pennies are a nuisance to the business community, and 3) pennies cost the nation as a whole. These major supporting details help you fully understand the main idea. To read effectively, then, you must learn to recognize main ideas and the details that support these ideas.

Outlining

Preparing an outline of a passage often helps you understand and see clearly the relationship between a main idea and its supporting details. Outlines start with a main idea (or a heading that summarizes the main idea), followed by supporting details. There are often two levels of supporting details—major and minor. The **major details** explain and develop the main idea. In turn, the **minor details** help fill out and make clear the major details.

Below is the paragraph on TV violence that appeared in Chapter 2. Its supporting details are *factual evidence* found in two studies. Reread the paragraph, and put a check (✓) next to the each of three major supporting details.

¹Many people feel that violence on television is harmless entertainment.
²However, we now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways.
³One study showed that frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others.
⁴They try to protect themselves from the outside world with extra locks on the doors, alarm systems, guard dogs, and guns.
⁵In addition, that same study showed that heavy TV watchers are less upset about real-life violence than non-TV watchers.
⁶It seems that the constant violence they see on TV makes them less sensitive to the real thing.
⁷Another study, of a group of children, found that TV violence increases aggressive behavior.
⁸Children who watched violent shows were more willing to hurt another child in games where they were given a choice between helping and hurting.
⁹They were also more likely to select toy weapons over other kinds of playthings.



Check Your Understanding

Now see if you can fill in the missing items in the following outline of the paragraph, which shows both major and minor details.

Main idea: We now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways.

Major detail: 1. Frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others.

Minor detail: Protect themselves with extra locks, alarms, dogs, and guns.

Major detail: 2. _____

Minor detail: Constant violence on TV makes them less sensitive to the real thing.

Major detail: 3. _____

Minor detail: _____

Explanation

You should have added two major supporting details: (2) Heavy TV watchers are less upset about real-life violence than non-TV watchers; (3) TV violence increases aggressive behavior in children. And to the third major supporting detail you should have added the minor detail that children watching violent shows are more likely to choose toy weapons instead of other playthings.

Notice that just as the main idea is more general than its supporting details, major details are more general than minor ones. For instance, the major detail "Frequent TV watchers are more fearful and suspicious of others" is more general than the minor details about people protecting themselves with "extra locks on the doors, alarm systems, guard dogs, and guns," which illustrate the major detail.

Outlining Tips

The following tips will help you prepare outlines:

TIP 1 Look for words that tell you a list of details is coming. Here are some common list words:

List Words

several kinds of
a number of
four steps

various causes
a series of
among the results

a few reasons
three factors
several advantages

For example, look again at the main ideas in the two paragraphs already discussed and underline the list words:

- But there are now good reasons for our government to phase the penny out of the economy.
- In fact, we now know that TV violence does affect people in negative ways.

Here the words *good reasons* and *negative ways* each tell us that a list of major details is coming. But you will not always be given such helpful signals that a list of details will follow. For example, there are no list words in the paragraph on page 67 with this main idea: “Shocking as it seems, cannibalism is common in the animal world.” However, you will want to note such list words when they are present, because they help you to understand quickly the basic organization of a passage.

TIP 2 Look for words that signal major details. Such words are called **addition words**, and they will be explained further on pages 182–183. Here are some common addition words:

Addition Words

one	to begin with	also	further
first (of all)	for one thing	in addition	furthermore
second(ly)	other	next	last (of all)
third(ly)	another	moreover	final(ly)



Check Your Understanding

Now look again at the selection on TV violence on page 105:

1. The word *one* (in *One study*) signals the first major supporting detail.
2. What addition words introduce the second major supporting detail?

3. What addition word introduces the third major supporting detail?

And look again at the selection on phasing out the penny on page 104:

1. What words introduce the first major detail? _____
2. What word introduces the second major detail? _____
3. What word introduces the third major detail? _____

Explanation

In the selection on TV violence, the second major detail is introduced by the words *In addition*, and the third major detail by the word *Another*. In the selection on phasing out the penny, the first major detail is introduced by the words *For one thing*; the second major detail by the word *also*; and the third major detail by the word *Finally*.



TIP 3 When making an outline, put all supporting details of equal importance at the same distance from the margin. In the outline on TV violence on pages 105–106, the three major supporting details all begin at the margin. Likewise, the minor supporting details are all indented at the same distance from the margin. You can therefore see at a glance the main idea, the major details, and the minor details.



Check Your Understanding

Put appropriate numbers (*1, 2, 3*) and letters (*a, b*) in front of the items in the following outline.

Main idea

- ___ Major detail
 - ___ Minor detail
 - ___ Minor detail
- ___ Major detail
 - ___ Minor detail
 - ___ Minor detail
- ___ Major detail

Explanation

You should have put a *1, 2,* and *3* in front of the major details and an *a* and *b* in front of the minor details. Note that an outline proceeds from the most general to the most specific, from main idea to major details to minor details.

The practice that follows will give you experience in finding major details, in separating major details from minor details, and in preparing outlines.



PRACTICE 1

Read and then outline each passage. Begin by writing in the main idea, and then fill in the supporting details. The first outline requires only major details; the second calls for you to add minor details as well.

- A.** ¹*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines *intimacy* as a state of "very close association, contact, or familiarity." ²Researchers have identified four kinds of intimacy. ³The first kind is physical. ⁴Fortunate children are continually nourished by physical intimacy: being rocked, fed, hugged, and held. ⁵As we grow older, we hug, shake hands, and continue to seek physical intimacy of all kinds. ⁶Intimacy can also come from intellectual sharing. ⁷When you engage another person in an exchange of important ideas, a kind of closeness develops that can be powerful and exciting. ⁸Another kind of intimacy is emotional: exchanging important feelings. ⁹Sharing personal information can both reflect and create feelings of closeness. ¹⁰Last, shared activities can be seen as a dimension that achieves intimacy. ¹¹Shared activities can include everything from working side by side at a job or in a study group or meeting regularly for exercise workouts.

Main idea: _____

Major detail: 1. _____

Major detail: 2. _____

Major detail: 3. _____

Major detail: 4. _____

- B.** ¹A crowd is a temporary, relatively unorganized gathering of people. ²Since a wide range of behavior is covered by the concept, sociologist Herbert Blumer distinguishes among four basic types of crowds. ³The first, a casual crowd, is a collection of people with little in common except for participating in a common event, such as looking through a department-store window. ⁴The second, a conventional crowd, is a number of people who have assembled for some specific purpose, such as attending a baseball game or concert. ⁵Members of

a conventional crowd typically act in accordance with established norms. ⁶The third, an expressive crowd, is a group of people who have gotten together for self-stimulation and personal satisfaction, such as a religious revival or a rock festival. ⁷And fourth, an acting crowd is an excited, explosive collection of people, including those who engage in rioting, looting, or other forms of aggressive behavior in which established norms carry little weight.

Main idea: According to sociologist Herbert Blumer, there are _____

Major detail: 1. _____

Minor detail: _____

Major detail: 2. _____

Minor detail: _____

Major detail: 3. _____

Minor detail: _____

Major detail: 4. _____

Minor detail: _____

Study Hint: At times you will want to include minor details in your study notes; at other times, it may not be necessary to do so. If you are taking notes on one or more textbook chapters, use your judgment. It is often best to be aware of minor details but to concentrate on writing down the main ideas and major details.

Mapping

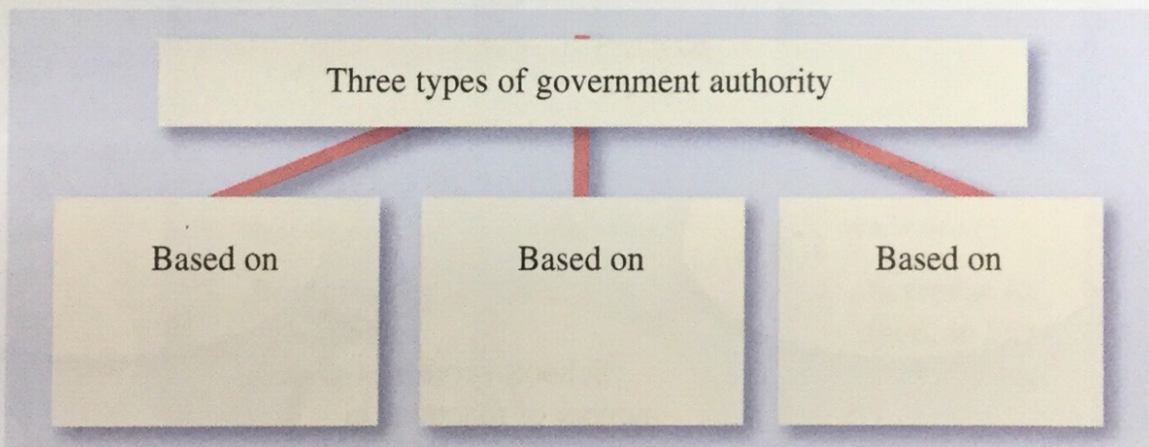
Students sometimes find it helpful to use maps rather than outlines. **Maps**, or diagrams, are highly visual outlines in which circles, boxes, or other shapes show the relationships between main ideas and supporting details. Each major detail is connected to the main idea, often presented in the form of a title. If minor details are included, each is connected to the major detail it explains.



Check Your Understanding

Read the following passage, and then see if you can complete the map and the questions that follow.

¹Weber says that there are three types of authority from which governments gain their right to command. ²One type of authority is based on tradition. ³Kings, queens, feudal lords, and tribal chiefs do not need written rules in order to govern. ⁴Their authority is based on long-standing customs and is handed down through generations from parent to child. ⁵People may also submit to authority because of charisma, the exceptional personal quality of an individual. ⁶Such leaders as Napoleon and Gandhi illustrate authority that derives its legitimacy from charismatic personalities. ⁷The political systems of industrial states are based largely on a third type of authority: legal authority. ⁸These systems derive legitimacy from a set of explicit rules and procedures that spell out the ruler's rights and duties. ⁹Typically, the rules and procedures are put in writing. ¹⁰The people grant their obedience to "the law." ¹¹It specifies procedures by which certain individuals hold offices of power, such as governor or president or prime minister. ¹²But the authority is vested in those offices, not in the individuals who temporarily hold the offices.



Which word or words introduce:

1. The first major detail? _____
2. The second major detail? _____
3. The third major detail? _____

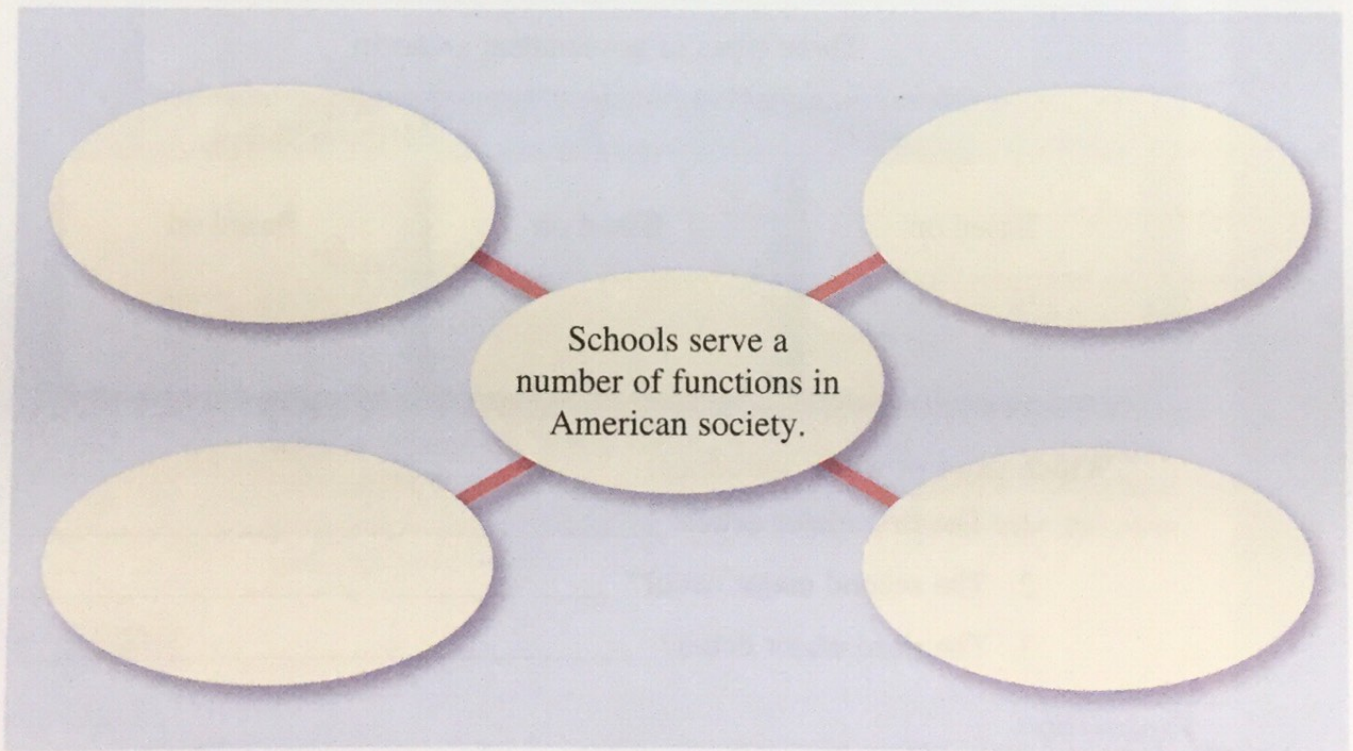
Explanation

The map sets off the major details in a very visual way. You see at a glance what Weber's three types of governmental authority are based on: tradition, charisma, and law. The words that introduce the major details are *One*, *also*, and *third*.

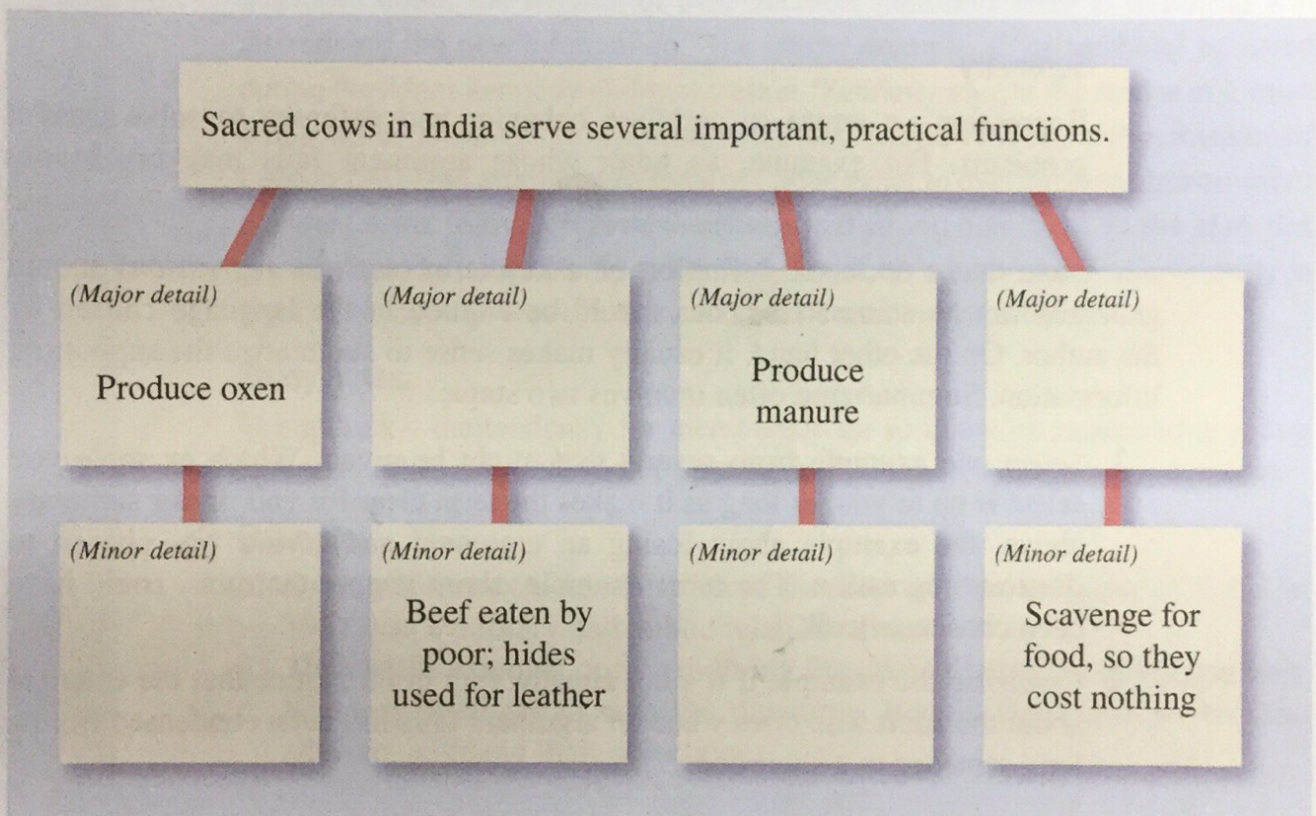
**PRACTICE 2**

Read each passage, and then complete the maps that follow. The main ideas are given so that you can focus on finding the supporting details. The first passage requires only major details. The second passage calls for you to add both major and minor details.

- A.** ¹Schools serve a number of functions in American society. ²Because most students are unmarried, high schools and colleges act as matchmaking institutions. ³It is at school that many young people find their future spouses. ⁴Schools also establish social networks. ⁵Some adults maintain friendships from high school and college; others develop networks that benefit their careers. ⁶Another function of schools is to provide employment. ⁷With 53 million students in grade and high schools, and another 15 million enrolled in colleges, U.S. education is big business. ⁸Primary and secondary schools provide jobs for 2.9 million teachers, while another million work in colleges and universities. ⁹Moreover, schools help stabilize employment. ¹⁰To keep millions of young people in school is to keep them out of the labor market, protecting the positions of older workers.



- B.** ¹In India, which has the largest number of cattle in the world, why is the slaughter of cows forbidden when there are many poor and starving people? ²Some social scientists have pointed out that the sacred cows serve several important, practical functions. ³First, they produce oxen, which Indians farmers desperately need to plow their fields and pull their carts. ⁴In addition, cows are of benefit when they die naturally. ⁵Their beef is eaten by the poor lower castes, and their hides are used by non-Hindu Indians to maintain one of the world's largest leather industries. ⁶Third, the cows produce an enormous amount of manure, which is used as fertilizer and cooking fuel. ⁷Fourth, the cows are easy to raise. ⁸They are tireless scavengers, eating garbage, stubble, and grass between railroad tracks, in ditches, and on roadsides. ⁹Thus, it costs nothing to raise the cows, and they provide many things of value.



Summarizing

A **summary** is the reduction of a large amount of information to its most important points. The length and kind of summary will depend upon one's purpose as well as the material in question. Often, a summary will consist of a main idea and its major supporting details. As a general guideline, a paragraph might be reduced to a sentence or two, an article might be reduced to a paragraph, and a textbook chapter might be reduced to about three pages of notes.

One of the most common types of summarizing occurs when you are taking study notes on textbook material. Very often you will find it helpful to summarize examples of key terms. For instance, look at the following textbook passage and the summary that follows.

¹People under severe stress may react to their problems with **regression**, a return to childlike behavior and defenses. ²Adults who cry when their arguments fail may expect those around them to react sympathetically, as their parents did when they were children. ³Other adults may use temper tantrums in a similar way. ⁴In both examples, people are drawing on childish behaviors to solve current problems, in the hope that someone will respond to them the way adults did when they were children. ⁵Inappropriate as it may seem, such immature and manipulative behavior often works—at least for a while.

Summary

Regression—a return to childlike behavior and defenses to solve current problems. For example, an adult whose argument fails may cry to get sympathy.

Note that a textbook definition of a key term (such as *regression*) should generally not be summarized, but should be worded in the language chosen by the author. On the other hand, it usually makes sense to summarize the supporting information. Summarizing often involves two steps:

- 1 *Select* one example from several that might be given. Which example you select is up to you, as long as it makes the term clear for you. In the summary above, the example about losing an argument and crying was chosen to illustrate regression. The other example, about temper tantrums, could have been chosen as well.
- 2 *Condense* the example if it's not already very brief. Notice that the example about the adult who cries when an argument fails has been condensed from a long sentence to a short one.

A definition of a key term followed by one condensed example is a very useful way to take notes—especially in introductory college courses, where many terms are defined and illustrated.

Study Hint: If you have a textbook chapter to learn, very often you can get the information you need by doing two things: 1) writing down the definitions in the chapter and summarized examples of the definitions, and 2) writing down lists of major supporting details and any minor details that you think are important.



Check Your Understanding

Read the selection below, taken from an introductory textbook for a college social science course. As is often the case in such introductory texts, a new term is presented and then followed by an extended example. Complete the study notes by circling the answer choice that best summarizes that example.

¹The tendency for members to be so intent on maintaining group agreement that they overlook or put aside the flaws in their decision is called **groupthink**.
²Once a tentative decision has been made, members withhold information or opinions that might cast doubt on that course of action. ³They do not want to be seen as criticizing their colleagues or as “rocking the boat.” ⁴If outside experts raise questions about the wisdom of their decision, members unite in opposing and discrediting the new information. ⁵The classic example of “groupthink” occurred during President Kennedy’s administration. ⁶Kennedy sought the advice of a small group of trusted advisers in deciding whether to support the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961—an attempt by a force of Cuban exiles to overthrow the government of Fidel Castro. ⁷Although several advisers had strong objections to the plan, not one expressed doubts. ⁸As far as Kennedy knew, his advisers were unanimously in favor. ⁹The invasion was a military and public relations disaster.

Study notes:

Groupthink—the tendency for members to be so intent on maintaining group agreement that they overlook or put aside the flaws in the group’s decision.

Example—

- A. During Kennedy’s administration, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 was a military and public relations disaster.
- B. The classic example occurred during President Kennedy’s administration.
- C. Kennedy went ahead with the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion because advisers withheld their objections.

Explanation

Useful study notes should clearly show how an example illustrates a new term. In the case of the paragraph above, the notes should include the key point that Kennedy’s advisers overlooked the flaws in a decision. Only answer C includes the idea that advisers withheld their objections in order to seem unanimously in favor of the Bay of Pigs invasion, which turned out to be a disaster. Answer A tells about the results of the Bay of Pigs invasion, but says nothing about how the advisers withheld their true opinions. Answer B also makes no mention of what the advisers did. It refers to the example so generally that the event isn’t even mentioned.

**PRACTICE 3**

Read each textbook selection below. Then complete the study notes by circling the letter of the answer that best summarizes an example of the term being defined.

- A.** ¹People are often motivated by the direct object of a desire, such as food or water. ²A **secondary reinforcer** is something one learns to desire through association with other, direct rewards. ³It is referred to as secondary not because it is less important, but because it is learned. ⁴A rat learns to get food by pressing a bar; then a buzzer is sounded every time the rat presses the bar and gets food. ⁵Even if the rat stops getting the food, it will continue to press the bar just to hear the buzzer. ⁶Although the buzzer by itself has no value to the rat, it has become a secondary reinforcer. ⁷For humans, money is a secondary reinforcer. ⁸Money is just paper or metal, but through its association with food, clothing, and other objects of desire, it becomes a powerful reward. ⁹Children come to value money only after they learn that it will buy such things as candy, something that has direct value to them. ¹⁰Then the money becomes a secondary reinforcer, something they have learned to want.

Study notes:

Secondary reinforcer—something one learns to desire through association with other, direct rewards.

Example—

- A. People are motivated by the direct objects of their desires, such as food, water, clothing, and candy.
- B. Money is desired not for its own sake but because of its association with direct rewards of desire.
- C. After a rat learns to get food by pressing a bar, a buzzer is sounded every time the rat presses the bar to get food.
- B.** ¹According to one sociologist, virtually every organization includes “higher participants” (such as the administrators) and “lower participants” (the rank and file). ²**Coercive organizations** are among the most common types of organizations. ³Prisons, concentration camps, and custodial mental hospitals are examples of coercive organizations. ⁴In each, force or the threat of force is used to achieve the organization’s main goal: keeping the inmates in. ⁵The inmates obviously do not enjoy being imprisoned; they will run away if they have the chance. ⁶They are alienated from the organization and do not support its goals at all. ⁷Understandably, the higher participants—such as prison administrators—have to act tough toward the inmates, seeking compliance by threatening solitary confinement if they try to escape. ⁸In brief, in this kind of organization, coercion, or force, is the main form of power used, and the involvement by lower participants is alienating.

Study notes:

Coercive organizations—organizations in which force or the threat of force is used to achieve the main goal: keeping in inmates, who are alienated from the organization.

Example—

- A. Every organization includes “higher participants” (such as administrators) and “lower participants” (rank and file).
- B. In coercive organizations, force is the main form of power used, and the involvement by lower participants is alienating.
- C. In a prison, inmates will run away if they can, and the administrators seek obedience by threatening solitary confinement.

**PRACTICE 4**

Read each textbook selection below. Then take study notes by 1) writing down the key term and its definition, 2) selecting an example that makes the definition clear, and 3) writing that example in your notes, condensing it if possible.

- A.** ¹A **Pyrrhic victory** is a victory won at enormous cost. ²A good example of such a victory is provided by the person whose name the term comes from: Pyrrhus, a Greek mercenary general who invaded Italy and attacked the Romans in 281 B.C. ³Pyrrhus defeated the Roman army sent against him, but his own army suffered terrible losses. ⁴“One more such victory and I am ruined,” he exclaimed. ⁵The Battle of Borodino in 1812 was another classic instance of a Pyrrhic victory. ⁶Napoleon’s invading French army defeated a defending Russian army near Moscow and occupied the city. ⁷But the French suffered so greatly from the battle and the winter that followed that the invasion turned into a disaster that cost Napoleon his throne.

Study notes:

A Pyrrhic victory—_____

Example—_____

B. ¹To protect their self-esteem, some people will practice **suppression**, which is a deliberate attempt to avoid stressful thoughts. ²For instance, Jeff wants to avoid thinking about an argument he had with his girlfriend. To keep it out of his mind, he spends as much of his time as possible hanging out with his buddies, talking about and playing sports. ³An elderly woman whose husband has died keeps herself busy with chores and volunteer work. ⁴Scarlett O'Hara in the novel and movie *Gone with the Wind* is among the more famous practitioners of suppression. ⁵Remember her line "I shall think about it tomorrow"? ⁶Scarlett was suppressing her unpleasant thoughts.

Study notes:

Example— _____

A Final Note

This chapter has centered on supporting details as they appear in well-organized paragraphs. But keep in mind that supporting details are part of readings of any length, including selections that may not have an easy-to-follow list of one major detail after another. Starting with the reading at the end of this chapter (page 125), you will be given practice in answering all kinds of questions about key supporting details. These questions will develop your ability to pay close, careful attention to what you are reading.

CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter, you learned the following:

- Major and minor details provide the added information you need to make sense of a main idea.
- List words and addition words can help you to find major and minor supporting details.
- Outlining, mapping, and summarizing are useful note-taking strategies.
- Outlines show the relationship between the main idea, major details, and minor details of a passage.
- Maps are very visual outlines.
- Writing a definition and summarizing an example is a good way to take notes on a new term.

The next chapter—Chapter 4—will show you how to find implied main ideas and central points.



On the Web: If you are using this book in class, you can visit our website for additional practice in recognizing supporting details. Go to www.townsendpress.com and click on "Online Learning Center."