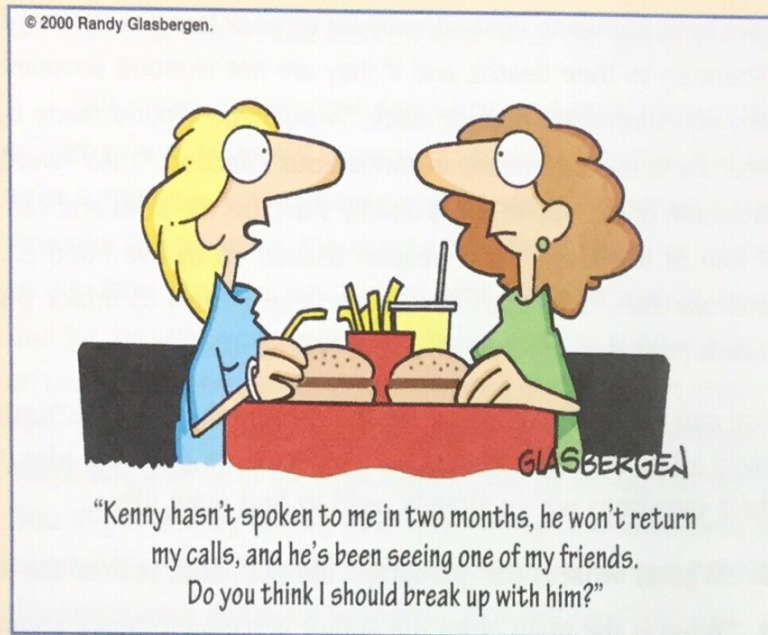


# 4

## Implied Main Ideas



In Chapters 2 and 3, you learned the two basic parts of anything you read: a *main idea* and the *supporting details* that explain and develop that idea. As you have seen, the main idea may be clearly stated in one sentence of a selection.

However, sometimes the main idea may be **implied**—only suggested by the supporting details and not clearly stated in one sentence. The reader must figure out an implied main idea by considering the supporting details. In the above cartoon, you can figure out the main idea by noting the details: the speaker's boyfriend hasn't spoken to her in two months, won't return her calls, and is dating one of her friends. The clearly implied idea is that *he* has already broken up with *her*!

This chapter offers practice in finding implied main ideas, both in paragraphs and in longer selections.



## Implied Main Ideas in Paragraphs

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Sometimes a selection lacks a sentence that directly states the main idea. In such cases, the author has simply decided to let the details of the selection suggest the main idea. You must figure out what that implied idea is by deciding upon the point all the details support. For example, read the following paragraph.

<sup>1</sup>Slashing their swords wildly, swordfish swim through schools of fish, trying to slice as many as possible; then they feast. <sup>2</sup>When hooked by fishermen, they have been known to fight nonstop for three or four hours. <sup>3</sup>They have pulled some fishermen to their deaths, and if they are not clubbed senseless when captured, they will slash fishermen on deck. <sup>4</sup>A puncture wound made by a swordfish bill means a severe and nearly instantaneous infection. <sup>5</sup>Their sword, which is a bony extension of the upper jaw, is deadly sharp on the sides and can grow to a length of four or five feet. <sup>6</sup>It is a weapon backed up by five hundred pounds of sleek, muscular fish. <sup>7</sup>Swordfish have even been known to attack boats, driving their swords right through the hull and at times sinking them.

You can see that no sentence in the paragraph is a good “umbrella” statement that covers all of the other sentences. To decide on the main idea, we must ask the same three questions we’ve already used to find main ideas:

- “Who or what is this paragraph about?” That will be the topic.
- “What is the main point the author is trying to make about that topic?”
- And when we think we know the main point, we can test it by asking, “Does *all or most* of the material in the paragraph support this idea?”

In the paragraph above, all of the details are about swordfish, so that must be the topic. Which of the following statements expresses the general point that the author is trying to make about the topic? Check (✓) the answer you think is correct.

- A. Swordfish will attack entire schools of fish.
- B. Swordfish will fight for hours when hooked and have even pulled some fisherman to their deaths.
- C. A swordfish bill can cause severe infections and even sink a boat.
- D. Swordfish are aggressive, dangerous fish.

The details reveal the author’s general point to be answer D: swordfish are aggressive, dangerous fish. All the other statements above are supporting details for this main idea—each tells of a way in which swordfish are aggressive and dangerous. Although the main idea is not directly stated, it is clearly implied by all the material in the paragraph.



## Figuring Out Implied Main Ideas in Paragraphs

Remember, to find implied main ideas, it often helps to decide on the topic first. Do so by asking yourself, “Who or what is the selection about?” After you find the topic, then ask yourself, “What is the author’s main point about the topic?”



### Check Your Understanding

Read the selection below, and then try to answer the questions that follow.

<sup>1</sup>All writers get bogged down now and then. <sup>2</sup>Accept the fact that sooner or later writer’s block will happen to you. <sup>3</sup>When it does, one response is to try to write something—no matter how awkward or imprecise it may seem. <sup>4</sup>Just jot a reminder to yourself in the margin (“Fix this,” “Redo,” or “Ugh!”) to fine-tune the section later. <sup>5</sup>Another way to deal with a writing snag is leave a blank space—a spot for the right words when they finally come to mind at a later time. <sup>6</sup>Then move on to an easier section, see if you can write that, and then return to the challenging part. <sup>7</sup>It may also help to reread to yourself or out loud what you’ve already written. <sup>8</sup>Regaining a sense of the large context may be enough to overcome writer’s block. <sup>9</sup>You might also try talking your way through a troublesome section. <sup>10</sup>Like most people, you probably speak more easily than you write; by speaking aloud, you tap this oral fluency and put it to work in your writing.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What is the topic of the above paragraph?
- A. Writer’s block
  - B. Writing and talking
  - C. The writing process
  - D. Rereading your writing
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which statement best expresses the unstated main idea of the paragraph?
- A. Writing is not easy.
  - B. There are various ways to deal with writer’s block.
  - C. Talking about what you are trying to write may help you break out of a writing snag.
  - D. Write easier sections of a paper first and come back later to a harder section.

### Explanation

The topic, referred to directly or indirectly in several sentences, is writer’s block. The implied main idea about writer’s block is that there are various ways to deal with it. Statement A, “Writing is not easy,” is too broad, and statements C and D are too narrow—each referring to only one specific way to deal with writer’s block.



When you think you have determined an implied main idea, test yourself by asking, “Does all or most of the material in the paragraph support this idea?” Almost the entire paragraph above is made up of practical suggestions for responding to writer’s block.



## PRACTICE 1

Read each paragraph, and then answer the questions that follow. Remember to find a topic by asking “Who or what is the selection about?” and to find an implied main idea by asking “What is the author’s point about the topic?”

**Hint:** Noticing addition words (such as *first*, *another*, *also*, *moreover*, and *finally*) will help you identify the major supporting details that can suggest the main idea.

### Paragraph 1

<sup>1</sup>What way do you prefer to learn? <sup>2</sup>Some people find it easier to understand what they see in print than what they hear. <sup>3</sup>Others find it easier to understand things they hear. <sup>4</sup>Some people prefer seeing a picture to reading words. <sup>5</sup>Think about your own learning preferences. <sup>6</sup>For example, imagine that you need to get from your home to someplace you have never been before. <sup>7</sup>What would be the easiest way for you to find the place? <sup>8</sup>Some people want to *look* at a map. <sup>9</sup>Others prefer to *read* a list of step-by-step directions. <sup>10</sup>Still others prefer to be *told* a list of step-by-step directions so that they can *hear* them. <sup>11</sup>Know what is best for you.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What is the topic of the above paragraph?
  - A. Learning preferences
  - B. Learning through hearing
  - C. Learning through pictures
  - D. Learning through print
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which statement best expresses the unstated main idea?
  - A. Some people understand better by reading something rather than hearing it.
  - B. Some people learn best by seeing a picture rather than reading words.
  - C. Directions that are helpful for one person may not be helpful for another.
  - D. People should be aware of and take advantage of their learning preferences.



## Paragraph 2

<sup>1</sup>According to Dale Carnegie, one way to make people feel important is to remember their names. <sup>2</sup>Greeting people by name makes them feel liked and valued. <sup>3</sup>So does greeting them warmly and enthusiastically. <sup>4</sup>Convey delight when you see or hear from someone you know, Carnegie advises. <sup>5</sup>In conversations, allow people to talk about themselves: their experiences, their views, their goals, their work, their hobbies, their relationships. <sup>6</sup>Encourage them by listening attentively, asking questions, and otherwise showing interest. <sup>7</sup>Also, be generous with your praise. <sup>8</sup>Compliment people—not falsely, but in genuine appreciation of their accomplishments and merits.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What is the topic of the above paragraph?
- A. Ways to greet people
  - B. Ways to make people feel important
  - C. The values of attentive listening
  - D. The benefits of providing compliments
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which statement best expresses the unstated main idea?
- A. Greeting people by name makes them feel liked and valued.
  - B. Compliment people in a sincere way.
  - C. Dale Carnegie has suggested a number of ways to make people feel important.
  - D. In conversations, allow people to talk about themselves.

## Paragraph 3

<sup>1</sup>Flextime, or flexibility of working hours, has become popular in recent years. <sup>2</sup>The most obvious advantage is less absenteeism. <sup>3</sup>When employees can choose working hours that meet their needs, they are less likely to take time off. <sup>4</sup>Another advantage of flextime is more efficient use of the physical plant. <sup>5</sup>The additional hours that a company is “open for business” could mean higher productivity and greater profits. <sup>6</sup>Finally, giving employees a choice of working hours permits them more control over their work environment, leading to increased job satisfaction and less turnover.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What is the topic of the above paragraph?
- A. Giving employees a choice
  - B. Absenteeism at work
  - C. Flextime
  - D. The most popular employee benefits



- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which statement best expresses the unstated main idea?
- A. Flextime leads to increased job satisfaction and higher productivity.
  - B. People who can choose their working hours are less likely to take time off.
  - C. Companies have found that flextime keeps employee turnover down.
  - D. Companies have found that flextime has several advantages.



## PRACTICE 2

The main idea of each of the following paragraphs is unstated, and each paragraph is followed by four sentences. In the space provided, write the letter of the sentence that best expresses each unstated main idea.

Remember to consider carefully all of the information given and to ask yourself the following two questions:

- Who or what is the selection about? In other words, what is the topic?
- What is the author's main point about that topic? In other words, what is the implied main idea?

Then test your answer by asking:

- Does *all or most* of the material in the paragraph support this idea?

### Paragraph 1

<sup>1</sup>The most common means of communication for insects is chemical. <sup>2</sup>Pheromones are chemicals with which an insect influences the behavior of other insects in its group. <sup>3</sup>For example, the queen bee, on her flight from the hive, secretes a pheromone that attracts drones, whose sole function is to mate with the queen. <sup>4</sup>Ants secrete pheromones that mark a trail from the nest to a food source. <sup>5</sup>Only members of the ant's own colony recognize the trail. <sup>6</sup>Fireflies communicate during the mating season not with chemicals but by flashing a light. <sup>7</sup>The female of each species emits a special series of flashes that males of her species recognize. <sup>8</sup>Other insects communicate by tapping, rubbing, or stroking each other. <sup>9</sup>Sometimes these are part of an elaborate courtship ritual. <sup>10</sup>Perhaps the most complex of all forms of insect communication is the dance of the honeybee. <sup>11</sup>When a forager bee finds a source of nectar, she returns to the hive and does a "waggle dance." <sup>12</sup>The dance lets other bees know where the food is.



- \_\_\_\_\_ Which statement best expresses the unstated main idea of the paragraph?
- A. Research has shown that animals do not communicate as people do.
  - B. All creatures need to communicate with each other.
  - C. Insects communicate through chemicals, visual signals, certain kinds of touching, and motions.
  - D. Insects have ways of communicating with each other about food sources.

### Paragraph 2

<sup>1</sup>Cosmetic surgery is often presented as easy and painless, not like surgery at all but rather like dyeing hair or putting on nail polish. <sup>2</sup>This idea is reflected in casual, lighthearted terms like “tummy tuck.” <sup>3</sup>But the risks of cosmetic surgery include an adverse reaction to the anesthesia used, excessive bleeding, and postoperative infection. <sup>4</sup>Also, muscles and nerves can be damaged during the surgery, and the patient may be paralyzed or may even, in rare instances, die. <sup>5</sup>Even if the patient recovers well, there is also the risk of an unacceptable result—that is, the patient looks worse, not better—in which case further surgery may be needed, perhaps several times. <sup>6</sup>Finally, even a reasonably successful outcome may be disappointing because it does not miraculously change the patient’s whole life: a prettier nose, say, will not ensure fame, fortune, or romance.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Which statement best expresses the unstated main idea of the paragraph?
- A. People often get cosmetic surgery in hopes of improving their romantic lives.
  - B. Merely looking more attractive is not a good enough reason to get cosmetic surgery.
  - C. Cosmetic surgery is riskier than it’s often portrayed to be.
  - D. Casual, lighthearted terms like “tummy tucks” should be eliminated from cosmetic surgery advertising.

### Paragraph 3

<sup>1</sup>In some countries defeated by Nazi Germany during World War II, almost the entire Jewish population was murdered. <sup>2</sup>But in Denmark, the story was different. <sup>3</sup>After the Nazis took over Denmark in April 1940, complaints from the Danish people prevented the Germans from freely pursuing Danish Jews. <sup>4</sup>Then, in August 1943, the Nazis made demands that the Danes take action against the Jews. <sup>5</sup>Unwilling to obey, every important government official resigned. <sup>6</sup>When the German military commander decided to send Danish Jews to concentration camps, average citizens in Denmark began hiding Jews in their homes until they could be moved to the coast. <sup>7</sup>Also, the Danish church, royal family, and a variety of organizations protested the new German policy. <sup>8</sup>In the end, Danish fishermen succeeding in transporting



about seven thousand Jews to Sweden. <sup>9</sup>When the Germans moved the five hundred Danish Jews they found to a concentration camp, the Danish people kept up a public outcry and sent food and clothing packages to help save their countrymen. <sup>10</sup>All but about one hundred Danish Jews survived the war.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Which statement best expresses the unstated main idea of the paragraph?
- A. The Nazis were determined to take widespread action against the Danish Jews.
  - B. Danish fishermen were the real heroes in saving their Jewish fellow citizens.
  - C. Jews in other European countries could have been saved if their fellow citizens had acted as the Danes did.
  - D. The Danish people, acting with their government, saved thousands of lives by refusing to cooperate with Nazi invaders.

## Putting Implied Main Ideas into Your Own Words

When you read, you often have to **infer**—figure out on your own—an author’s unstated main idea. The implied main idea that you come up with should cover all or most of the details in the paragraph.



### Check Your Understanding

See if you can find and write the topic of the paragraph below. Then write the implied main idea in your own words. Finally, read the explanation that follows.

**Hints:** Remember that you can help yourself identify the topic and main idea if you 1) look for repeated words as you read and 2) try to mark major supporting details. Major details are often signaled by such common addition words as the following:

#### 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)

<sup>1</sup>Nonverbal messages are more emotionally powerful than verbal ones. <sup>2</sup>Nonverbal behaviors tell people about our emotional state. <sup>3</sup>When we want to convey how we feel about someone, language often fails us. <sup>4</sup>Nonverbal messages



are also more universal than verbal ones. <sup>5</sup>Members of different linguistic groups must spend a lot of time and effort to learn each other's verbal codes, but they can communicate instantly by smiling or wrinkling their faces in disgust. <sup>6</sup>Some researchers have shown a number of emotions to be expressed in the same way by members of different cultural groups. <sup>7</sup>Last, nonverbal messages are more continuous and natural than spoken language. <sup>8</sup>Because gestures and body movements flow into one another without obvious beginnings and endings, they seem to be a more natural part of our existence than words.

What is the topic of this paragraph? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the implied main idea of this paragraph? \_\_\_\_\_

### Explanation

One key to the topic here is the phrase *nonverbal messages*, which is repeated through the paragraph. The other key to the topic is the list of major details in the paragraph. Two of the details are signaled by addition words (*also* in “Nonverbal messages are also” and *last* in “Last, nonverbal communication is”). Here are the three major details in the paragraph.

- Nonverbal messages are more emotionally powerful than verbal ones.
- They are more universal.
- They are more continuous and natural.

What do those three major details have in common? They're all about nonverbal messages (or behaviors), so that phrase can be considered the topic. And the author's main point about that topic could be stated like this: *Nonverbal messages have several advantages over verbal ones.*



### PRACTICE 3

In the spaces provided, fill in the topic of each paragraph. Then, using your own words, write the implied main ideas of the paragraphs.

#### Hints:

1. To find the topic, it often helps to look for repeated words in a paragraph.
2. To identify the topic and main idea, mark major supporting details as you read. These major details are often signaled by such common addition words as the ones shown in the box on the previous page.



- A.** <sup>1</sup>Why do fashions occur in the first place? <sup>2</sup>One reason is that some cultures, like that of the United States, value change: What is new is good. <sup>3</sup>And so, in many modern societies, clothing styles change yearly, while people in traditional societies may wear the same style for generations. <sup>4</sup>A second reason is that many industries promote quick changes in fashions to increase sales. <sup>5</sup>A third reason is that fashions usually trickle down from the top. <sup>6</sup>A new style may occasionally originate from lower-status groups, as blue jeans did. <sup>7</sup>But most fashions come from upper-class people, who like to adopt some style or artifact as a badge of their status. <sup>8</sup>They cannot monopolize most status symbols for long, however. <sup>9</sup>Their style is adopted by the middle class and may be copied or modified for use by lower-status groups, offering many people the prestige of possessing a high-status symbol.

*Topic:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Implied main idea:* \_\_\_\_\_

- B.** <sup>1</sup>A hurricane is a relatively flat system of winds rotating around a center where the atmospheric pressure is abnormally low. <sup>2</sup>This system can be hundreds of miles across and usually brings heavy rains along with its powerfully strong winds. <sup>3</sup>As with a hurricane, air pressure at the center of a tornado is very low; but a tornado is a violently rotating column or “funnel” of air, usually reaching down from a thundercloud, and is typically only a few hundred yards across. <sup>4</sup>Wind speeds in a hurricane are about 75 to 150 miles per hour, but the wind speed in a tornado might be 300 miles per hour. <sup>5</sup>A hurricane may last for one or more days; a tornado lasts only a few minutes. <sup>6</sup>Locally, tornadoes are even more destructive than hurricanes.

*Topic:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Implied main idea:* \_\_\_\_\_

- C.** <sup>1</sup>During the American Revolution, the British army far outnumbered the American colonial army, and the British frequently fought with cannons, while the Americans had none. <sup>2</sup>However, the British troops had to fight more than three thousand miles away from home, which meant that reinforcements, money, and supplies took months to reach the battlefield. <sup>3</sup>Americans fought in their own territory, which was undeveloped and unfamiliar to the British, and American troops were supported by local and French supplies stationed nearby. <sup>4</sup>The British forces were more likely to fight in straight lines across the battlefield, kneeling down in the open to reload their weapons. <sup>5</sup>American troops also used linear tactics, but they were just as likely to fight using the cover of trees and buildings. <sup>6</sup>Whenever the British retreated from a battle, they would do so in single file, and this allowed the colonists to sneak around the British formation to pick off more soldiers. <sup>7</sup>Perhaps the most important



difference between the two armies, however, was that of motivation. <sup>8</sup>The British troops fought to control the colonists and secure wealth for the English king. <sup>9</sup>The Americans fought for freedom and the defense of their homeland, and every colonial soldier had a high personal stake in the war's outcome.

*Topic:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Implied main idea:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Implied Central Ideas in Longer Passages

More often than not, authors of essays, articles, and textbook selections will state their central points or ideas in much the same way as they state their main ideas in a single paragraph. Occasionally, however, the central point will be implied rather than stated directly.

As you learned in Chapter 2, you can find a central point in the same way you find a main idea—by looking for a topic and considering the supporting material. The central idea that you come up with should cover all or most of the details in the passage.



### Check Your Understanding

Read the following selection. Then, in the space provided, see if you can write the letter of the sentence that best expresses the unstated central idea.

#### Modifying Behavior

<sup>1</sup>Can people modify their own behavior? <sup>2</sup>The answer is yes.

<sup>3</sup>The first thing to do is to decide what behavior you want to acquire—the desired “target” behavior. <sup>4</sup>What if you want to get rid of some behavior? <sup>5</sup>Behavior modification specialists emphasize a positive approach called “ignoring.” <sup>6</sup>Much better results are achieved when the emphasis is on the new behavior to be acquired rather than on the behavior to be eliminated. <sup>7</sup>For example, instead of setting a target of being less shy, you might define the target behavior as becoming more outgoing or more sociable. <sup>8</sup>Other possible target behaviors are behaving more assertively, studying more, and getting along better with your roommate. <sup>9</sup>In each case, you have focused on the behavior that you want to acquire rather than on the behavior that you want to reduce or eliminate.



<sup>10</sup>The next step is to define the target behavior precisely: What exactly do you mean by “assertive” or by “sociable”? <sup>11</sup>One way to do this is to imagine situations in which the target behavior could be performed. <sup>12</sup>Then describe in writing these situations and the way in which you now respond to them. <sup>13</sup>For example, in the case of shyness, you might write: “When I am sitting in the lecture hall, waiting for class to begin, I don’t talk to the people around me.” <sup>14</sup>Next, write down how you would rather act in that situation: “Ask the people sitting next to me how they like the class or the professor; or ask if they have seen any particularly good movies recently.”

<sup>15</sup>The last step—which gets to the heart of self-modification—is to provide yourself with a positive reinforcer that is gained only upon specific improvements in the target behavior. <sup>16</sup>You may be able to use the same reinforcer that now maintains your undesirable behavior, or you may want to pick a new reinforcer. <sup>17</sup>Researchers use the example of a student who wanted to improve his relationship with his parents. <sup>18</sup>He first counted the times he said something pleasant to them and then rewarded himself for improvement by making his favorite pastime, playing pool, dependent on predetermined increases in the number of pleasant remarks he made. <sup>19</sup>You can also use tokens: Give yourself one token for every thirty minutes of studying, and cash in those tokens for reinforcement. <sup>20</sup>For instance, the privilege of going to a movie might require ten tokens.

\_\_\_\_\_ Which sentence best expresses the implied central idea of the entire selection?

- A. Research has taught us a great deal about behavior modification.
- B. Positive reinforcement is the key step in behavior modification.
- C. Emphasis should be placed on acquiring new behavior rather than eliminating an old one.
- D. By following several steps, you can modify your behavior.

### **Explanation**

The central point is a general statement that covers all or most of the details in a reading. To find the central point of the essay above, look first at its topic. Since the title is “Modifying Behavior,” and every paragraph is about that subject, we can say “Modifying Behavior” is the topic. Then decide on what point is being made about the topic by looking at the major details of the essay. The first major detail, presented in the second paragraph, is on deciding what behavior you want to acquire. The next major detail, in the third paragraph, is about defining just what that desired behavior would be. The third major detail, in the fourth paragraph, is providing a positive reinforcer for that desired behavior.

The central point, then, will be a general statement that covers all of the details presented. That statement can be expressed simply as “By following several steps, you can modify your behavior.”



**PRACTICE 4**

The central idea of the following passage is implied rather than stated, and the passage is followed by four sentences. In the space provided, write the letter of the sentence that best expresses the unstated central idea.

<sup>1</sup>If exercise could be packed into a pill, it would be the single most widely prescribed and beneficial medicine in the nation. <sup>2</sup>In a survey, eight in ten undergraduates realized that physical activity can prevent heart disease and prevent and treat obesity. <sup>3</sup>However, fewer than half knew that it maintains bone density and can help prevent diabetes.

<sup>4</sup>With regular exercise, your heart muscles become stronger and pump blood more efficiently. <sup>5</sup>Your heart rate and resting pulse slow down. <sup>6</sup>Your blood pressure may drop slightly from its normal level.

<sup>7</sup>Exercise thickens the bones and can slow the loss of calcium that normally occurs with age. <sup>8</sup>Physical activity increases flexibility in the joints and improves digestion and elimination. <sup>9</sup>It speeds up metabolism and builds lean body mass, so the body burns more calories and body fats decrease. <sup>10</sup>It heightens sensitivity to insulin (a great benefit for diabetics) and may lower the risk of developing diabetes. <sup>11</sup>In addition, exercise enhances clot-dissolving substances in the blood, helping to prevent strokes, heart attacks, and pulmonary embolisms (clots in the lungs), and it helps lower the risk of certain cancers. <sup>12</sup>Regular exercise can actually extend your lifespan and sharpen your memory and mind.

<sup>13</sup>Even your eyes benefit from physical activity. <sup>14</sup>Individuals who exercise three or more times a week may reduce by 70 percent their risk of age-related macular degeneration, which destroys the sharp central vision needed for tasks such as reading and driving.

\_\_\_\_\_ Which sentence best expresses the implied central idea of the entire selection?

- A. Few undergraduates realize all the health benefits of exercise.
- B. Nothing is better than exercise to help your body function at its best.
- C. Science needs to develop a pill that will provide all the benefits of exercise.
- D. Exercise can make your heart pump more efficiently and improve your digestion and elimination.



## CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter, you learned the following:

- At times authors imply, or suggest, a main idea without stating it clearly in one sentence. In such cases, you must figure out that main idea by considering the supporting details.
- To find implied central points in longer reading selections, you must again look closely at the supporting material.

The next chapters—Chapters 5 and 6—will explain common ways that authors organize their material.