

A main idea is like the hub of a wheel. The hub holds the wheel together, and everything circles around it. In a paragraph, the main idea holds the information together. All the facts and details revolve around the main idea.

Why do we bother to look for main ideas? Social studies is not just a bunch of facts. Instead, it is about facts and their meanings. When we find main ideas, we find the meaning behind the details.

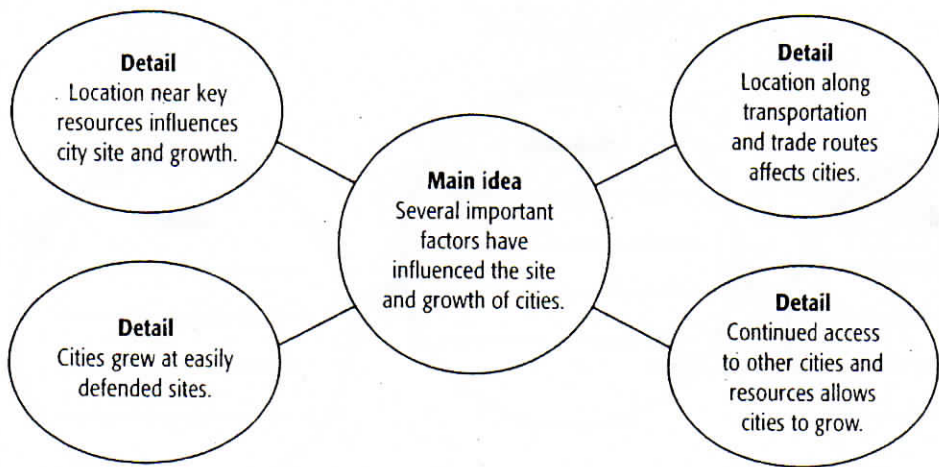
HOW TO IDENTIFY MAIN IDEAS AND DETAILS

To identify a main idea and details, follow these three basic steps:

- 1. Identify the topic of the paragraph.** Ask yourself, "What is this paragraph mostly about?"
- 2. Note important facts and details that relate to the topic.** The details help you understand something about the topic of the paragraph.
- 3. Determine the main idea.** The main idea is the main point about the topic. It shapes the paragraph's content and the meaning of all the facts and details in it. Sometimes the main idea is stated clearly in a sentence. Other times the main idea is only suggested, not stated.

City Growth
 A number of different factors have influenced the site and growth of cities. One is location near key resources. Other factors include location along transportation and trade routes and at easily defended sites. Many of the world's greatest cities grew up where two or three of these factors were present. Once cities are established, continued access to other cities and resources allows them to grow and prosper.

From *World Geography Today*, Human Systems



Identifying Main Ideas and Details

Reading Skills

Reading Geography

As you read about geography you will come across a lot of new information. To make sure you grasp important points as you read, practice identifying the main idea and details. That way you will know you are focusing on the right information.

YOU TRY IT!

Read the following passage. Then fill in the diagram with the main idea and supporting details. Remember, the main idea might not always be stated in the paragraph.

Culture
 Because of their shared history, Ireland and Great Britain share many cultural features. Social life is often centered around local eateries. Sports such as soccer, rugby, and cricket are popular. In addition, English is the main language of both countries. However a small number of Irish also speak Irish Gaelic, and some Scots speak Scottish Gaelic.

From *World Geography Today*, Northern and Western Europe

