

Understanding Beginning Paragraphs

People read texts for many reasons. They read for pleasure, for information, and as directives for their actions. A well-written text will engage the reader immediately. The beginning paragraph of a text will usually tell us what we will read about. We look for main ideas there.

Sometimes, the topic sentence or main idea is the first sentence of the paragraph. This sentence will be followed by supporting information. Sometimes, the topic sentence can be the second sentence or even the last sentence of the first paragraph. When the topic sentence is at the end of the paragraph, the previous sentences give us information that leads to the main idea.

A good way for us to think about the main idea of a text is to read the beginning paragraph and then pause or take a break from our reading. During this break, we ask ourselves the question, "What is the point?" or "What is the author trying to tell me?" Our answer will be the main idea. All the sentences join to give us a message. After we have finished reading through a text and have recorded some facts and questions in our reading notes, it is fun to reflect on whether we have guessed the main idea correctly.

Read the following beginning paragraph of a text about Raleigh, North Carolina.

Think about the main idea.

Raleigh, North Carolina

Raleigh, North Carolina, is a very popular place to live. First, the climate in Raleigh is very mild. Second, the landscape and scenery in Raleigh are beautiful. There are many flowers, trees, and lakes. The city is clean and efficiently managed. Raleigh has many parks and much space where people can live, work, and play. As a result, Raleigh is a desirable place to live and visit.