



# Discovering the main idea

Student edition



*Purpose for reading: To identify the main idea*

**PAGE 1**

**Introduction:** Most articles have "leads" — opening sentences that clearly state the main idea. But some articles may not openly share everything; in these cases, you must infer the main idea. This lesson will help you:

- ▶ Locate the main idea in an article by focusing on context clues, headlines, subtitles, details and key points.
- ▶ Infer the main idea, if it is not openly stated.

*When trying to find out the main idea of a text, ask yourself, "What is the author trying to tell me?"*

- 1. **As a class**, read one or two short blurbs from Moneyline. Underline the main idea and circle the facts that support the main idea.
- 2. **With a partner**, select a short blurb from either Sportsline or Lifeline.
- 3. Read the blurb. Once you have finished reading, go back and re-read it. This time, circle what you think is the main idea and underline the details/facts/key points. In one sentence, write down the main idea in your own words.
- 4. **As a class**, share and discuss your findings.
- 5. **With your partner**, read the article, "Side-crash tests will soon get much tougher to pass." You will be identifying the main idea of this article. Follow the process below:
  - ▶ Preview the headline and subhead. What do you think the main point of the article will be?
  - ▶ Take turns reading the article aloud to one another.
  - ▶ Once you have finished reading the article, ask yourselves: "What is the main point of this article? What is the author trying to tell me?"
  - ▶ Using your own words, write a one-sentence summary that identifies the main idea of the article. Begin your summary with: The main idea of this article is . . .



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6. **As a class**, share some of your one-sentence summaries. Once a set of partners has read their summary, ask them how they know they identified the main idea correctly.
7. Why is writing a one-sentence summary an effective way to discover a text's main idea? Are there times when the previewing/reading/summarizing process you used during this assignment might not work? How could this process help you on future reading assignments or on standardized tests?
8. **Extension:** Write a one-page essay that answers one of the following "main idea" questions. Or, create your own "main idea" question to answer.
- ▶ What is the main reason(s) we use seatbelts?
  - ▶ What is the main reason(s) we should eat breakfast daily?
  - ▶ What is the main reason(s) we should get a good night's sleep (at least eight hours)?
  - ▶ What is the main reason(s) athletes should not use steroids?
  - ▶ What is the main reason(s) for coming to school?
  - ▶ What is the main reason(s) for being a safe driver?
  - ▶ What is the main reason(s) girls should or should not play on a boy's football team?
  - ▶ What is the main reason(s) we should not drink and drive?

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Teacher edition

## Page 1

Time Requirement:  
55 minutes

This lesson will help students identify the main idea of a text by following a simple process.

### Standards:


- ▶ Identifying details/facts
- ▶ Identifying main idea/essential message
- ▶ Analyzing and/or evaluating information
- ★ This lesson is writing intensive.

*To ensure student understanding, it is best to read aloud the italicized instructions embedded in the lesson.*


**1. Model:** Read a headline from Moneyline to the class. Think aloud about what the main idea of the blurb might be and explain why you think that. Then, read the blurb and ask, "What is the main point of this paragraph? What is the author trying to tell me?"

**Elicit:** Read a second blurb and ask students to explain what they think the main idea is and how they came to that conclusion. Point them toward the headline and then guide them in asking questions: "What is the main point of this paragraph? What is the author trying to tell me?" What facts or details from the paragraph help me answer these questions?

**Direct instruction:** Remind students that the shorter an article is, the easier it is to identify the main idea. But, the process for discovering the main idea is the same no matter what the length of the story. Readers should still preview the headline and subtitles, look at the photos and captions, read the article and ask themselves, "What is the main point the author is trying to make?" Allow 10 minutes.



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**2-3. Guided practice:** Ensure students are using the process you modeled. Allow 10 minutes.

**4. Reinforce:** As students share their one-sentence summaries, reinforce the "discover the main idea" process of pre-viewing, reading and questioning. Allow 5 minutes.

**5. Monitor:** Assess students' ability to identify the main idea by walking around the room, answering questions and assisting when needed. Allow 20 minutes.

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55 minutes

**6-7. Review:** Again, reinforce the process. Allow 10 minutes.

**8. Extension:** This assignment can be done as homework, or, if you are on block scheduling, in class. Ask individuals to share their one-page essays and have the class attempt to identify the “main idea” of each student’s paper.



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As seen in



September 6, 2007

# Side-crash tests will soon get much tougher to pass

## Rule could mean all cars get side air bags by 2012

By Jayne O'Donnell and James R. Healey, USA TODAY

The government Wednesday ordered automakers to beef up side-crash protection by late 2012, something car companies say they're already doing faster than the new regulation requires.

The rule announced by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration does not dictate how automakers must improve head and torso protection for occupants of vehicles that are hit from the side. But it adopts a tough test procedure that both NHTSA and automakers say will result in all vehicles having side-impact torso and head-curtain air bags.

Every major automaker agreed in December 2003 on a voluntary industry test that is all but impossible to pass without head-protecting inflatable curtains. The car companies

agreed to make their vehicles pass that industry test by September 2009, three years earlier than the new NHTSA rule requires. But the new NHTSA rule appears to be harder to pass.

"It's a very stringent set of test requirements," says Chris Tinto, Toyota's safety vice president. "It will require changes to vehicles' structure and additional sensors."

"We're all in favor of voluntary agreements because the auto industry can move more quickly, but this was significant enough we thought we needed to regulate," NHTSA chief Nicole Nason said. Congress also required NHTSA to issue the rule.

Automakers try to pass crash tests by a wider margin if they are part of federal rules than if they are voluntary standards. That's because they have to recall vehicles that fail federal tests but not those that fail industry standards.

Cars will continue to be tested on how well they protect the people inside when hit from the side by another vehicle. But the new rule also establishes a test that will simulate

crashing sideways into a tree or a telephone pole. Trees and poles are involved in 9% of all side crashes and 21% of fatal side crashes.

Side crashes are among the deadliest collisions. They were responsible for about 9,200 fatalities, or about 29% of people killed in vehicles in 2005, the latest data available.

The new NHTSA rule also adds a requirement for crash-test dummies that simulate small-stature women.

"The only way automakers will be able to meet the requirements of both tests plus protect taller males and shorter females is to have full curtains and torso air bags," Nason says.

NHTSA had forecast that the rule would save about 1,000 lives a year but dropped that to 300 Wednesday.

The agency had to recalculate to account for crashes it believes will be prevented by electronic stability control, which NHTSA is requiring in all vehicles as of 2012 models.