



# Distinguishing main ideas from supporting details

## Applying for a job

UNIT AIMS

**Skill:** distinguishing main ideas from supporting details

**Vocabulary:** work topic vocabulary

**Exam practice:** First Paper 1 Part 5

### Improve your reading skills: distinguishing main ideas from supporting details

**What is distinguishing main ideas from supporting details?**

*A text usually contains a small number of main ideas. Each main idea may be supported by examples, reasons, further information and other supporting details. To fully understand a text, you need to be able to see what a main idea is and what a supporting detail is. It is an important part of understanding the structure of a text.*

- 1** Which of the following is not a supporting detail?
- A a summary of the whole text
  - B an explanation of the reasons why something is true

**Why is distinguishing main ideas from supporting details important?**

*When you read, it's important to understand the structure of the text. It helps you to pay attention to the most important things. Part of that is distinguishing main ideas from supporting details. The main ideas show you the key points in the text. The supporting details show you why the writer believes the main ideas. Understanding both of these things is an important part of understanding the text as a whole.*

- 2** Supporting details help you to understand
- A why you are reading a text.
  - B the reasons for the writer's opinions.

**How do you distinguish main ideas from supporting details?**

*You need to understand what kind of information (examples, reasons, etc) is usually presented as supporting details. Look out for this kind of information and see what it refers to. Pay particular attention to the first sentence of each paragraph, which is often the 'topic sentence' (although sometimes the topic sentence may appear later in the paragraph). This usually makes a main point, which the rest of the paragraph then supports. Make a note of all the main points, together with any supporting details provided. Compare this to the structure of the text as a whole.*

- 3** It helps if you know that examples and reasons are usually
- A main points.
  - B supporting details.

**How is distinguishing main ideas from supporting details important in First?**

*Distinguishing main ideas from supporting details is particularly important in First Paper 1 Parts 5 and 6 and helps with Part 7. In Part 5, it helps you to answer questions on the way the text is organised and other features of the text, such as examples. In Part 6, it helps you understand the structure of the text. Then, you can see how each removed sentence fits into the text structure. In Part 7, you may need to understand supporting details in order to do the matching task.*

- 4** How does distinguishing main ideas from supporting details help in Part 6?
- A You can see how each removed sentence relates to the whole text.
  - B You can see examples of sentences that have been removed.

## Get started

Look at the photo and answer the questions.

- What might the woman on the right have done to reach this interview?
- Which of these emotions might the woman be feeling? Why?

angry ■ bored ■ excited ■ nervous ■ pleased

- What do you think might happen next?

## Develop your vocabulary

1 Match to make phrases.

- |               |   |              |
|---------------|---|--------------|
| 1 job         | — | a form       |
| 2 learning    | — | b market     |
| 3 careers     | — | c counsellor |
| 4 application | — | d packet     |
| 5 pay         | — | e curve      |

2 Write a word from the box in each gap to complete the sentences.

apply ■ attend ■ gain ■ land ■ offers ■ send

- You can \_\_\_\_\_ valuable experience taking a summer job in an office.
- If you \_\_\_\_\_ for a job, make sure you research the company carefully.
- After months of trying, Tony finally managed to \_\_\_\_\_ a job.
- Jean was ill, so she couldn't \_\_\_\_\_ the interview she'd been preparing for.
- My advice is to \_\_\_\_\_ out as many applications as you can.
- You will probably have to fill in dozens of application forms before a company \_\_\_\_\_ you a job.

3 Read the paragraph and circle the correct words.

Dear Alan,

A new job (1) **chance / opportunity** has just come up that we feel is ideal for you. The (2) **employee / employer** is opening new offices in the north-east, which could mean fast growth and rapid (3) **promotion / qualification** for someone willing to work hard. Please note, however, that this is an entry-level (4) **position / location** and as such you should not expect to be offered a very high (5) **post / salary**. Have a closer look at the advertisement online at [www.starrecruitment.co.uk](http://www.starrecruitment.co.uk) and, if you are interested, send me an up-to-date (6) **CV / PS** and a covering letter explaining why you are suitable for the job.

With best wishes,  
Deborah Willis  
Star Recruitment



## Develop your reading skills: distinguishing main ideas from supporting details

1 Read the text and label the underlined sentences. You will use one of the letters twice.

- a supporting reason
- b example
- c topic sentence

1 —  
That's not the only point. Managers will often put a CV on the rejection pile for any number of reasons. This is not something one should take personally.  
2 — It happens because they will receive hundreds of applications for a job and need a way to cut that number down quickly to the twenty or so they intend to interview. The list is obviously endless, but includes major gaps, such as lack of qualifications, and minor oversights, such as spelling errors. 4 —

2 Match each topic sentence with a supporting detail.

- 1 Very few people in a new job could carry out their duties perfectly from the start. —
- 2 It is worth doing a course, if that skill is in great demand at present. —
- 3 Latest figures show record unemployment for 16-year-old school leavers. —
- 4 This particular recruitment agency has a remarkable record of filling job vacancies. —
- 5 There are lists of standard interview questions on the internet. —
- a This has been put down to the current economic climate, which shows no sign of improving.
- b The main reason for this is that they make sure their recommended candidates are suitable.
- c Employers understand that there is a learning curve in every position.
- d An obvious example is computer literacy, which is a must in every office nowadays.
- e These include classics like 'What's your greatest weakness?' and candidates should have an answer prepared.

3 Match the paragraphs with the topic sentences.

There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

- 1 — No-one is expecting an interviewee to grin manically throughout the interview, but there's nothing worse than a blank or worried expression. Here's an old trick: looking up at the ceiling and raising your eyebrows just before entering the interview room will relax your face.
- 2 — Interviewers spend all day listening to answers to the same set of questions, and so they would appreciate someone who is concise. Also, digressing into an anecdote about your Aunt Sandy doesn't say much for your ability to focus on one task. If you have a relevant story to tell, practise it until you can deliver it in as few words as possible.
- 3 — Scratching the nose or breaking eye contact, for example, are both sure signs that the interviewee is not being entirely honest. Someone who does not sit straight might be lazy, while someone who sits too straight is probably not creative. These are subjective and perhaps hasty judgements, but interviewers are human, like everyone else.
- a Your face should be open and friendly, inviting conversation from the interviewer.
- b Small details, such as posture, or the way you hold your head, have a greater impact than you can imagine.
- c One interviewer we surveyed said she pays a lot of attention to a candidate's body language.
- d Candidates should keep their answers to the point, without being monosyllabic.

4 Write a word or phrase from the article in each gap to complete the sentences.

**Modern failures?**

UK companies are complaining that more and more school leavers that apply to them for jobs lack the basics in education. 'I need security guards who can write short reports,' said Tina Hutton, personnel manager at Failsafe Security. 'When some of them try to spell, they come up with words that not even a computer spellchecker would recognise!' Young people today rely on word processor programs that autocorrect and cannot even do simple arithmetic without a calculator to help them. Many teachers blame this dependency on modern technology for falling standards among school leavers. As a result, many firms are putting potential interviewees through a series of tests before they even talk to them.

- 1 The article is about young people who apply for jobs without having a basic \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 Many of them can't \_\_\_\_\_ or do \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 The reason given is that they depend too much on \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 Because of this, companies sometimes only interview candidates after they have sat some \_\_\_\_\_.

5 Write 'MI' for main idea or 'SD' for supporting detail.

- 1 If you don't produce a good covering letter, that might be as far as the application process goes. \_\_\_\_\_  
The covering letter is the first thing that an employer will read. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Getting their first job is one of those moments everyone remembers. \_\_\_\_\_  
It's likely to be something like a papergirl or a waiter, but you still feel a real thrill. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 It's partly because he's lazy, but he has also had some extremely bad luck. \_\_\_\_\_  
My brother hasn't had a steady job for over three years and no job at all for the past twelve months. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 Benefits of the position include one free meal every shift and tips. \_\_\_\_\_  
We have an opening for a waiter to cover evening shifts at our busy seaside hotel. \_\_\_\_\_



**6** Each of these paragraphs includes supporting details. Match each paragraph with a statement showing the role of the supporting detail.

- 1 I always made sure I kept all my applications carefully and systematically filed away. That way, I never got confused even if I was dealing with twenty of them simultaneously, all at different stages. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 Job satisfaction should be uppermost in a graduate's mind when considering what jobs to apply for. Big pay packets might be tempting, but in the end nothing can compare to a contented working life. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 Many of today's school leavers are finding themselves jobless within twelve months of leaving school. They include Leo Mann, who left at sixteen, expecting to find work on a building site, but is now considering returning to college. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4 Laura's father owns a large shipping company and she had a position waiting for her. That's why she could swan off on a round-the-world trip after the exams, while we applied for job after job. \_\_\_\_\_
- a giving an example of the main idea
  - b expanding on the main idea
  - c giving a reason for the main idea
  - d giving a consequence of the main idea

**7** Read the article and answer the questions.

## Graduating to robbery?

**T**om McGregor, 23, walked into the Leith Street branch of the National Bank at 11am on Friday and demanded money at gunpoint. After emptying the cashiers' tills of £15,000, he left and attempted to make his getaway on foot. Unfortunately for him, he ran straight into two police officers, who arrested him. McGregor explained that he had been unable to find a job since graduating from university and poverty had forced him into this desperate act. The gun turned out to be a replica.

- 1 Who robbed the bank?
- 2 When did he rob it?
- 3 How much did he steal?
- 4 What happened to him after he left the bank?
- 5 What makes McGregor an unusual bank robber?
- 6 Why did he rob the bank?

**8** Write a topic sentence to complete the gap in the article in exercise 7.



*Exam focus:*distinguishing main ideas from supporting details in *First*

- 1 Look at the exam practice section on pages 36 and 37 and circle the correct word or phrase in each sentence.
  - 1 You will find the main idea of each paragraph near the **beginning / end**.
  - 2 A supporting idea comes **before / after** the main idea.
  - 3 **Examples / Reasons** might follow these words and phrases: *like, such as, including*.
  - 4 **Examples / Reasons** might follow these words and phrases: *because, since, in order to*.
  - 5 Knowing the main point of a paragraph would definitely help answer questions about **why the writer said something / the point the writer is trying to make**.

- 2 Read the text and underline the topic sentence.

Being the best candidate for the job is one thing. That alone is not of much help, however, if you cannot persuade your potential employer that no-one else can do the job better than you. This applies to the entire process, from sending your CV to attending the interview. You must shine at all stages, because your qualifications might impress them enough to get your foot in the door, but that could be as far as you will go. If you show a lack of vital personal qualities, such as a smart appearance and good communication skills, the interviewer will conclude that you are unlikely to be able to fit well into the company structure.

- 3 Read the text in exercise 2 again and choose the correct answer. The point the writer is trying to emphasise is that
 

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a it is important to create an impressive CV.</li> <li>b your performance in the interview makes a strong impression.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c you know that no other candidate is equal to you.</li> <li>d you must use every opportunity to prove your suitability.</li> </ol>
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- 4 Complete these sentences with the answers you did NOT use in exercise 3.

- 1 You will not be offered a job just because \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 In order to make it to the interview stage, \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 The way you look and speak is important because \_\_\_\_\_

- 5 Complete each statement with *Part 6* or *Part 7*.

In *First Paper 1*, distinguishing main ideas from supporting details

- 1 will help you to find what kind of sentence is missing in \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 will give you a way to break down short texts quickly in \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 will help you find the right answer when the gap is a topic sentence in \_\_\_\_\_.

**Skills tip**

In *First Paper 1 Part 5*, should you underline the topic sentences in the passage

- a while you are reading through it for the first time? **Yes / No**
- b after you have read it and the questions once? **Yes / No**

*Exam practice:***First Paper 1 Part 5**

You are going to read an article about a graduate looking for her first job. For questions 1–6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think best fits according to the text.

## OUT INTO THE *big wide world*

*Today's graduates are entering one of the toughest job markets in decades. Sylvia Morgan writes about how she finally landed that crucial first post.*

I was by no means typical among my peers, but I feel I was well organised in my approach to job hunting. Even before graduation, when many of my friends were enjoying what they termed their 'final year of freedom', I was attending career fairs and getting an idea of which companies were hiring in my chosen field – publishing. I had some sit-down meetings with representatives at the fairs and distributed my CV, but even then there was a feeling of 'let's wait and see'. Nobody wanted to commit and none of the companies seemed sure they would even have jobs to offer in the summer, assuming I graduated with the degree my lecturers expected from me.

I did, but found myself back home in July feeling I was starting again from square one. Although I had taken a short holiday straight after leaving university, I had spent it looking through newspaper job advertisements and online job sites. There had been very little movement in the publishing field and when I got home and found that none of the companies I had contacted before graduating were prepared to make a job offer, I made the pragmatic decision to widen my focus considerably.

I approached job hunting, as much as possible, as a job in itself. Monday to Friday, I put in nine-to-five days (with a break for lunch) filling out online application forms, sending out CVs and following leads. If something looked promising, I was prepared to work overtime in order to exploit the opportunity fully. When I got an interview, I did my homework as a sales representative on a business trip would: researching the company, plotting a sales strategy and trying to put myself in the potential employer's shoes by asking myself questions such as 'What are *they* looking for?'

So the interviews did start coming. There would have been many more, however, if I hadn't had a strict rule; I refused any that even hinted at working as an unpaid intern. These positions are becoming more and more common in the UK, which I think is an extremely damaging trend. Not only do young people nowadays get into debt to obtain a degree, but they also have to be prepared to work for six months or a year without remittance, in the hope of a position with a salary at the end of it. Certainly, you gain experience in the good positions of this kind, but in many you may end up as a glorified coffee maker.

Rejection is something you have to prepare yourself for mentally. First of all, because you will, in all likelihood, receive many of those dreaded emails (or letters, occasionally) before you get the break you are looking for. Secondly, because no matter how strong your self-confidence is, those brief polite sentences will eventually dent it. I strongly advise you not to walk that path alone. Compare notes with university friends and you will find many are going through the same thing. Without my friends, I would have felt like a failure and then I'd never have got a job.

Because I did, eventually, find someone who was prepared to overlook my lack of experience and appreciate my qualifications, I was offered a job and I accepted it. It was after 139 applications – I kept careful count. The starting salary isn't wonderful, but it's a young, fast-moving company with good opportunities for promotion. Three months on, I could look back at my six months of unemployment as a waste of time, but I prefer to see it as a learning curve and a growth experience. This is the real world and the more leisurely life of academic development, careers counselling and self-discovery at university is over.

- 1 From the first paragraph, we understand that
- A Sylvia feels like she missed out on a lot of opportunities at university.
  - B many of Sylvia's fellow students didn't focus on job-hunting before graduation.
  - C the job fairs Sylvia attended led to some promising possibilities.
  - D Sylvia wishes she had done more to obtain a job pre-graduation.
- 2 After returning home from her holiday, Sylvia
- A decided to start applying to publishing companies from the beginning.
  - B realised that she had been applying for jobs that she wasn't qualified for.
  - C immediately began searching newspapers and websites for jobs.
  - D switched to a more realistic approach to job-hunting.
- 3 What point is Sylvia making in the third paragraph?
- A Sales jobs are very often the hardest ones to get.
  - B Your approach to finding a job must be professional.
  - C You should be prepared to do overtime even when unpaid.
  - D How you find a job shows how well you will do in it.
- 4 What does the word 'remittance' mean in the fourth paragraph?
- A qualifications
  - B experience
  - C pay
  - D duties
- 5 When a job application ends in rejection, Sylvia believes you should
- A share the experience with people who can empathise.
  - B not allow it to do the slightest damage to your self-image.
  - C treat it as a valuable lesson in self-reliance.
  - D be prepared to examine your preconceptions about yourself.
- 6 How does Sylvia feel about the time she spent looking for work?
- A nostalgic about her university days
  - B determined never to let it happen again
  - C disappointed it didn't lead to a better job
  - D positive that it taught her a valuable lesson

### Skills tip

Beware of the wrong options – they are not called 'distractors' for nothing. They are trying to trick you into choosing them, so they will often correspond to something in the text. They might say the exact opposite, only be half-right or not say quite the same thing. They may even be all right and simply not answer the question that is being asked. Once you have identified the main idea of a paragraph, you can often rule out one or more of these options. Use this as a method of focusing on the answer to the more difficult questions.