1 Look for General versus Specific Ideas

You saw with the bullying paragraph that the main idea is a *general* idea supported by *specific* ideas. The following practices will improve your skill at separating general from specific ideas. Learning how to tell the difference between general and specific ideas will help you locate the main idea.

➢ Practice 1

Each group of words below has one general idea and three specific ideas. The general idea includes all the specific ideas. Identify each general idea with a **G** and the specific ideas with an **S**. Look first at the example.

Example

1. _S_ dogs
   _S_ goldfish
   _S_ hamsters
   _G_ pets

(*Pets* is the general idea which includes three specific types of pets: dogs, hamsters, and goldfish.)

LIVEWORKSHEETS

1. ___ home cooking
   ___ take-out
   ___ ways to eat dinner
   ___ frozen foods

2. ___ hot and humid
   ___ cold and rainy
   ___ cloudy with scattered showers
   ___ weather forecasts

3. ___ oversleeping
   ___ bad habits
   ___ overeating
   ___ smoking

4. ___ traffic delays
   ___ head cold
   ___ bad coffee
   ___ minor problems

5. ___ communicating
   ___ writing
   ___ reading
   ___ speaking

6. ___ deadbolt locks
   ___ alarm system
   ___ barking dog
   ___ kinds of security

7. ___ divorce
   ___ failing grades
   ___ major problems
   ___ eviction

8. ___ not taking notes in class
   ___ poor study habits
   ___ missing classes
   ___ cramming for exams

9. ___ surprised
   ___ tone of voice
   ___ enthusiastic
   ___ humorous

10. ___ hurry up
    ___ get to bed
    ___ commands
    ___ clean up this mess

Practice 2

1. Let's say you are describing a good friend. That he or she is a good friend is a general idea. List three *specific* reasons why he or she is a good friend.

   _____ _____ _____

2. All of us have certain valued material possessions in our lives. What are three *specific* objects that are very important to you?

   _____ _____ _____

3. Everyone has goals. What are three of the *specific* goals in your life?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. Most students have had teachers whom they admire. Name one such teacher and three *specific* qualities or behaviors that made you like or respect that teacher.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Name of teacher: _____

Specific qualities or behaviors: _____

_____

_____

5. At one time or another you had to do a really unpleasant chore or job. Write three *specific* reasons why that chore or job was so unpleasant.

_____

_____

_____

Practice 3

In the following groups, one statement is the general point and the other statements are specific support for the point. Identify each point with a P and each statement of support with an S.

1. ___ My family has real problems.
   ___ My mother has cancer.
   ___ My sister is pregnant.
   ___ I lost my job.

2. ___ Iris has a great smile.
   ___ Iris asks you questions about yourself.
   ___ Iris is a pleasure to be around.
   ___ Iris really listens when you talk.

3. ___ I feel short of breath.
   ___ I'm getting dizzy and sweating.
   ___ There is a pain in my chest.
   ___ I may be having a heart attack.

4. ___ My boss is hard to work for.
   ___ He lacks a sense of humor.
   ___ He never gives praise.
   ___ He times all our breaks to the second.

5. ___ We had different political beliefs.
   ___ The date was a nightmare.
   ___ We were dressed completely differently.
   ___ Both of us were too nervous to say much.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Practice 4

In each of the following groups, one statement is the general point, and the other statements are specific support for the point. Identify each point with a **P** and each statement of support with an **S**.

1. ___ A. Last night we could hear and smell a large animal prowling outside our tent.
   ___ B. Green flies with stinging bites are in abundance around our campsite.
   ___ C. The time has come to find a new campsite.
   ___ D. Nearby we came upon a nest of baby rattlesnakes.

2. ___ A. Children are at risk at the school.
   ___ B. There are two active gangs in the school.
   ___ C. Knives and guns have been found in lockers.
   ___ D. Drug busts have been made at the school.

3. ___ A. Cats are clean and do not require much attention.
   ___ B. There are definite advantages to having a cat as a pet.
   ___ C. Cats like living indoors and are safe to have around children.
   ___ D. Cats are inexpensive to feed and easy to keep healthy.

4. ___ A. Many credit card companies charge people annual fees of $25 to $50.
   ___ B. Credit card companies make money from their customers in several ways.
   ___ C. Nearly all credit-card companies charge people high interest rates, up to 20% or more.
   ___ D. Most credit card companies sell their customers' names and addresses to other companies.

5. ___ A. Communicating with family and friends using computer e-mail takes very little effort or time.
   ___ B. Finding information is as easy as typing several key words.
   ___ C. Shopping can be quickly handled online with a few clicks of the mouse and the use of a credit card.
   ___ D. Computers make everyday matters much easier.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Practice 5

In each of the following groups—all based on textbook selections—one statement is the general point, and the other statements are specific support for the point. Identify each point with a **P** and each statement of support with an **S**.

1. ___ A. Teenagers gather at malls to meet friends, eat fast food, and socialize.
   ___ B. Elderly people often walk at malls for exercise.
   ___ C. Malls have many uses in American society.
   ___ D. Malls provide space for community groups to stage events.

2. ___ A. Instead of working full-time, many of today's employees work part-time with little job security and few benefits.
   ___ B. Job security and our ideas about work have changed dramatically in recent years.
   ___ C. Unlike in years past, most people entering the workforce today will change jobs several times during their careers.
   ___ D. Rather than work for someone else, many of today's workers hope to start their own businesses.

3. ___ A. The American food industry is serving ever larger portions of food to American consumers.
   ___ B. Fast food restaurants including Burger King, McDonald's and Taco Bell now offer extra "super-sized" meals to customers.
   ___ C. Many chain restaurants in the U.S. today offer "all you can eat" buffets.
   ___ D. Supermarkets now feature oversized or "family size" portions of many foods.

4. ___ A. By decreasing the production of certain hormones, exercise lessens the risk of certain cancers.
   ___ B. Regular exercise strengthens the immune system, promotes mental health, and generates feelings of well-being.
   ___ C. People who exercise regularly have stronger bones, more limber joints, and a healthier heart.
   ___ D. Regular exercise four to five days a week has significant health benefits.

5. ___ A. When toddlers play, they are having fun, but they are also developing in important ways.
   ___ B. During play, young children are learning to use their muscles and becoming more coordinated.
   ___ C. Children pretending to be other people are exploring their identities and "trying on" other ones.
   ___ D. By making up stories and acting them out, children are learning about emotions and feelings.

LIVEWORKSHEETS