

How Can I Get the Main Idea If I Don't Know Where to Start?

Step 1:

Look at the text, and mark where the sentences begin and end. You're looking for periods, exclamation points, and question marks.

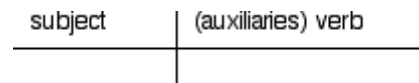
A good strategy would be to highlight or underline every other sentence.

Step 2:

Use clues to help divide each sentence into meaningful chunks. You're looking for commas, semi-colons, colons, and conjunction words.

Step 3:

Look at the first chunk of the first sentence. Locate the SUBJECT and the main VERB of the chunk. Put the subject and the verb into the diagram.



Step 4:

Look at the subject and the verb together. Do they make sense to you? If not, look up any unfamiliar words in the dictionary. If it still doesn't make sense, try and decide if the words have positive or negative connotations. Sometimes that's all you need to know...

Step 5:

Now look at the rest of the words in the first chunk. Are there any words that significantly modify either the subject or the verb?

You're looking for words like: never, not, seldom, rarely, etc...

You're also looking for words that have strong connotative meanings.

Step 6:

Put a note in the margin of the text indicating what you think the chunk means.

Step 7:

Repeat steps 1-6 for the rest of the chunks.

Step 8:

Think about how all of the chunks work together. Then consider how all of the sentences work together. Hopefully you now have the "gist" of the passage.