

Unit 4

Reading for Topics and Main Ideas

I: What is a paragraph?

Here are two groups of sentences, Example A and Example B that look like paragraphs. Read the sentences carefully then discuss with your partner whether they are paragraphs or not.

Example A:

In Thailand, people celebrate the Songkran Festival as the traditional New Year's Day from 13 to 15 April. In the morning, people go to the temple to make merits by offering food to monks and novices, observing the precepts, Five or Eight precepts and listening to the Dhamma talk. In the afternoon, they perform the bathing ceremony of the Buddha images with monks and novices who live in a temple. During this time, the younger people ask for blessings from the elders. This is known as Water Splashing Feast. It might be said that the Songkran festival is the festival of respect to the elders or the Family Day.

Is this a paragraph? :

Why or why not :

Example B:

In Thailand, people celebrate Songkran Festival as the traditional New Year's Day. It is the big festival as the traditional Thai New Year's Day from 13th to 15th April. Many people who are working far away come back to their home to celebrate with their family. There are many cars on the road going to the festival. This often causes traffic jams and sometimes accidents. Many people die during this period. The government tries to solve the problem by forbidding drinking alcohol while driving. Several families take a rest at their homes and many tourists fly into Bangkok particularly to enjoy one of the most colorful and festive times of the year.

Is this a paragraph? :

Why or why not :

In a paragraph, all of the sentences are about the same thing: that is, they are all about the same topic and they make sense together. Using this definition, we can see that Example a is a paragraph because all the sentences are about the same topic. They are about the importance of Songkran Festival in Thailand, so they make sense together. While the Example b is not a paragraph because the sentences are about many different topic. It is talking about going back their home, traffic jam, accident, government etc. not the topic of the passages ‘Songkran Festival’

Exercise 1: Some of these groups of sentences are paragraph and some are not.

Work in pair. Read each of them carefully and discuss with your partner. Then write the answer below the passage.

A. Songkran festival, called "New Year's Day", is from 13th to 15th April. On the day, people will have Rot Nam Dam Hua (pouring water) with the elders and most Thai people go back home to meet their family. Rot Nam Dam Hua is done to show respect for adults and to show gratefulness. During Songkran day, people go to make merit by offering food to the monks using a monk’s alms bowl, many people like Songkran day because it is a long holiday to be with the family.

Is this a paragraph? :

Why or why not :

B. In the four regions of Thailand, people celebrate Songkran Festival in different places. Probably the largest and wildest crowd in Bangkok; the entire 5 kilometers long of Silom street - mostly known as Patpong - is packed on two levels and waysides with thousands of the young, and they spray water to each other. In Phra Pradaeng district, where the Thai-Raman communities live out their Songkran traditions. Here, the celebrations take place about a week later than in central Bangkok. While sacred celebrations are held at Sanam Luang, opposite the Grand Palace. Here on the first day of Songkran the Buddha image 'Buddhasihing' is brought out from the National Museum and escorted along the streets for people to sprinkle water on. Many I-san Thais use this occasion to go back homes for family reunion and observe the holidays by spending time with families and friends

Is this a paragraph? :

Why or why not :

C. Smoking is very injurious to health and hard habit to break because tobacco contains nicotine, which is highly addictive. It is harmful both to smokers and their companions. It affects lungs and causes serious diseases as cancer, emphysema, and heart disease that it can shorten your life and that habit can cost a smoker thousands of baht a year. Besides, it pollutes the environment too. Government should take steps to fine the people smoking at public places.

Is this a paragraph? :

Why or why not :

D. Ajarn Wit is an English teacher. He teaches 'English skills development' to the first year students at the Language Center and he also teaches other subjects at the GE as 'English for study skills development' etc. too. The English skills development is a subject that studies about English grammar rules as nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives etc. 'The English for study skills development' concerns with reading skills in English sources.

Is this a paragraph? :

Why or why not :

II: What is a topic? And how to find it?

Ask yourself the question : *What is this paragraph or essay about?*

In the following paragraph, the writer does not mention the topic. Read the following passage and discuss with your partner then guess what it is about.

Malee is a student at VRU. She is on her second year in the English program. It belongs to HUSO faculty. She likes to study English and in her free time she goes to the library or the audiovisual room. She can teach English to her juniors or friends who seek her help when they do not understand something in English language. Malee can speak English very well with foreigners when they speak to her. Overall, Malee is a good student in English at VRU.

What does the above paragraph is talking about?

The whole paragraph above talks about only one thing- Malee. So Malee is the topic of this paragraph

The topic of most paragraphs is given in one word or a short phrase.

Now read the paragraph again and find what the writer mainly says about 'Malee'

It mainly says that Malee is a good student in English at VRU. This is the main idea of the paragraph.

Exercise 2: Read the lists of specific details and write a general phrase that could be the subject or topic for each group

A. boil water in a large pot
add salt and oil
pour noodles and vegetables into hot water
Topic:

B. switch on power
select a program
open a file
Topic:

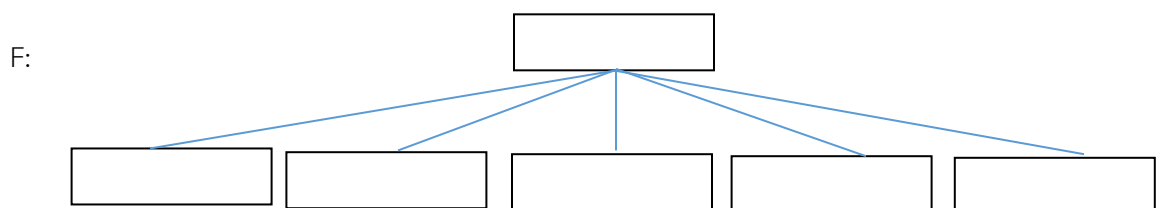
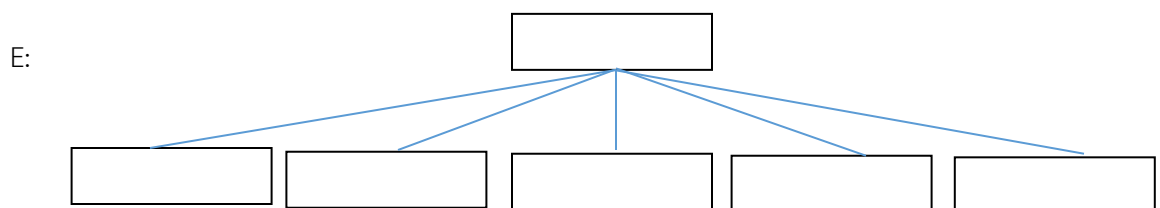
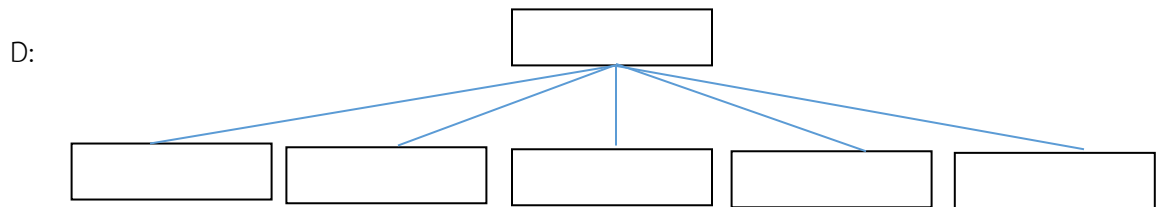
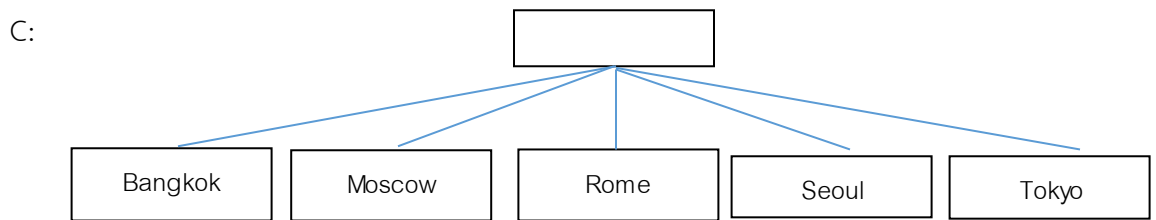
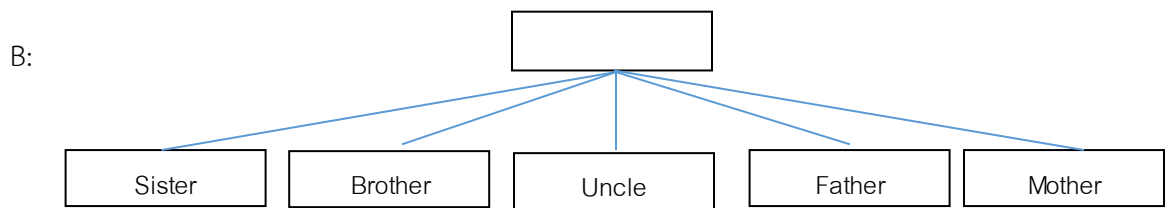
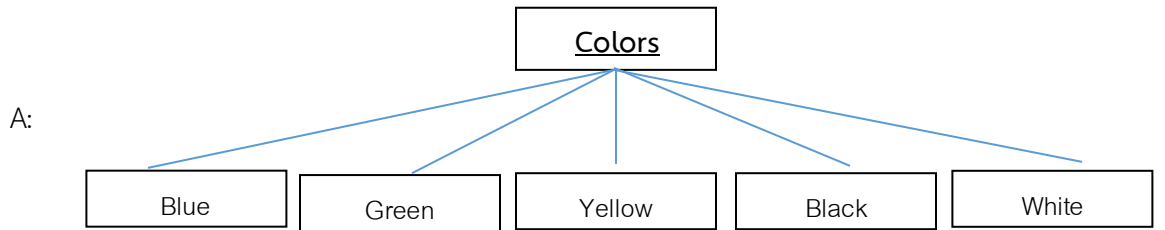
C. can go around the world easily with English
use to communicate with others in office
do any job with English
Topic:

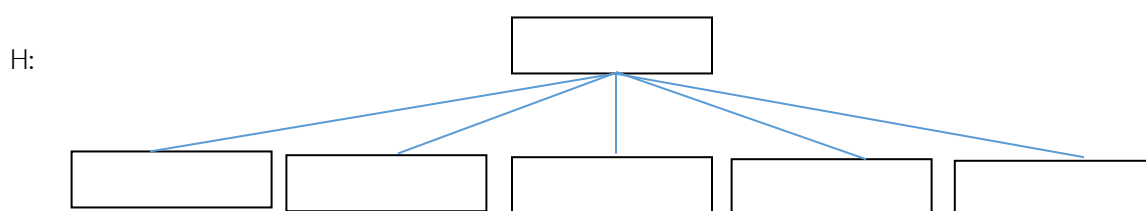
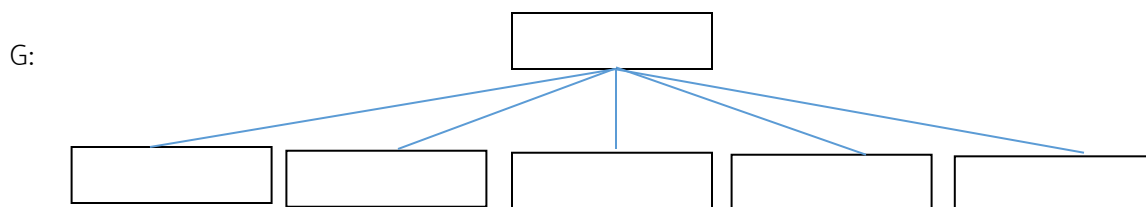
D. do not submit assignment
absent the class often
got fail
Topic:

E. meeting on time
never late to the office
complete work on time
Topic:

Exercise 3: Write the topic for details in each group

Example:





Exercise 4: Read the passage then discuss with other students: which topic is the best? Write the topic below the paragraph.

A. At present, English is an important part in everyday life. It is useful for everybody. When we work, some documents are written in English. When we go anyplace, many signs are written in English language. When we are at our home, some utensil tables are written in English. If anyone can communicate in English, they can find better job easily than those who do not know English. The more we know English the more we can communicate with foreigners and the more we can get the job easily.

Topic :

B. Preserved fish is a kind food for the people who live mostly in Northeastern of Thailand. It is made from fishes, crabs and herbs. It has a strong smell because it is fermented in a jar for a long time. Many I-san people like to eat it so much. Many use it to cook with many dishes like papaya salad, shrimp paste etc. The preserved fish is a famous dish in Northeastern.

Topic :

C. Language Center is a famous center to teach many languages. It offers both long and short courses such as English, Chinese, Korea, Japanese, Vietnamese,

and Cambodian etc. It has many foreign teachers from many countries like USA., China, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia etc. Every semester, the language center has the international cultural performance. It is an interesting cultural performance for students here. The language center is the good choice to select to study languages for students in Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University under the Royal Patronage.

Topic :

D. In Thailand, there are 4 regions, the North, the Northeast, the South and the Central Region, People in the 4 regions are different in terms of cultures and traditions. For example, ‘Tantung’ is in the North culture, ‘Bun Phawet’ or merit making of the 4th lunar month is in the Northeast, ‘Vegetarian Festival’ is in the South etc. People have different dialects for example dialects of the people in Bangkok, Northeast, North and South. Thus, the four regions in Thailand differ from each other.

Topic :

E. Knowing a foreign language is necessary for college students. It can help them in their major fields, especially when most textbooks for advanced students are in those foreign languages. It can also give them a better chance in their careers since many jobs require an ability in foreign languages.

Topic :

F. The Thai people tend to accept others ways of life easily. For example, they celebrate Christmas Day, Valentine’s Day and Halloween like the Americans. They also celebrate Chinese New Year Day like the Chinese people. However, some of them have a Chinese origin. Karaoke originated in Japan, and the Thais also like to sing karaoke as we can see from the many karaoke pubs around Bangkok and other cities.

Topic :

III: What is a Main Idea?

In upper, you can find the topic. Now, are you ready to find the main idea? What is a main idea?

Whether you read a single paragraph, a chapter, or an entire book, many experts agree that your most important single task is to understand the main idea of what you read. The main idea is the point of a paragraph. It is the most important thought about the topic. To figure out the main idea, ask yourself questions: What is the writer talking about (person, thing, or idea) on the text? The writer can locate the main idea in different places within a paragraph. The main idea is usually a sentence, and it is usually the first sentence. The writer then uses the rest of the paragraph to support the main idea.

Let's use the paragraph below as an example. First find the topic, then look for the main idea.

Example A: The easy exercise is using the stairs every day. Walking up the stairs instead of using the lift for about 15 minutes can burn up to 150 calories. The panel of experts has recommended that we should exercise at least 30 minutes every day or at least three days a week. It has even more health benefits when it burns about 300 calories per day.

In this paragraph:

the topic is "*the easy exercise*"

the main idea (what the writer is saying about the topic) is "*The easy exercise is using the stairs every day*"

Here is another example:

Example B: Obesity is caused by laziness. Many people like to think that "tomorrow, I will lose my weight or I will burn out". That is the thought of people who like to eat what they want and ultimately will cause them obesity. It is just the idea of a lazy exercise, only mouth that I would lose weight but eating habits, on the other hand, when eating a lot of sweets and not exercising, they will even get fat gradually. Finally, it also increases risks for diseases.

In this paragraph:

the topic is "obesity"

the main idea is in the first sentence: . Obesity is caused by laziness.

While the main idea is usually in the first sentence, the next most common place is in the last sentence of a paragraph. The writer gives supporting information first and then makes the point in the last sentence.

Note: What main idea is the writer trying to convey about the topic?

This statement should be:

- i: A complete sentence
- ii: Broad enough to include the important detail
- iii: Focused enough to describe the writer's slant

IV: Where do we find the main idea of a paragraph?

The main idea is the point of the paragraph. It is the most important thought about the topic. The main idea can be found in different places in a paragraph. The writers can locate the main idea in different places within a paragraph. The main idea is usually a sentence, and it is usually the first sentence. The writers then use the rest of the paragraph to support the main idea. Let's check the paragraph below as an example. First find the topic, then look for the main idea.

1. At the beginning of a paragraph. In most paragraph the main idea exists at the beginning-the first sentence.

Advertising affects our lives every day. Brand names are common household words. We start each day using the toothpaste, soap, and breakfast foods promoted by advertisers. Ads have made the cars we drive signs of our success. Our choices of food, dress, and entertainment are swayed by ads.

Topic: Advertising

Main idea: Advertising affects our lives every day

2. In the middle of a paragraph. In some paragraph the main idea comes in the middle of the paragraph.

Keep your tree outdoors until the day before Christmas. Never use lighted candles. **There are also other suggestions for avoiding a Christmas tree fire.** Turn off the lights before you leave the house and throw away the tree by New Year's Day.

Topic: Christmas tree

Main idea: There are also other suggestions for avoiding a Christmas tree fire

3. At the end of a paragraph. In some paragraph the main idea appears at the end – the last sentence of the paragraph.

Somsri gets up in the morning to prepare breakfast for all the family. Then she goes to work in an office from nine to five. She is a deputy manager in a factory, so she is busy all the time. She leaves work at five and arrives home around six o'clock. Then she prepares dinner and has dinner with her family. Finally, she cleans up the dishes and watches television. **Somsri is always busy doing both her office work and housework.**

Topic: Somsri

Main idea: Somsri is always busy doing both her office work and housework.

Exercise 5: Now it's your turn. Come up with at least two different main ideas for each of the topics below. You only have to write the main idea. Examples have been provided.

A. Topic : **television**

i) : Depending on what you watch, TV can be very educational.

ii) :

iii) :

iv) :

B. Topic : **hockey**

i) : The Leafs are having a better season this year.

ii) :

iii) :

iv) :

C. Topic : **driving**

i) : Getting my driver's license was the most nervous day of my life.

ii) :

iii) :

iv) :

D. Topic : **students**

i) : Having responsibility for oneself is difficult.

ii) :

iii) :

iv) :

Activity: Apply the three-question technique to identify the topic, key terms, and main idea of the following passages, all of which have stated main ideas.

A. To gain a better idea of what social structure is, think of college football. You probably know the various positions on the team: center, guards, tackles, ends, quarterback, running backs, and the like. Each is a status; that is, each is a social position. For each of these statuses, there is a role; that is, each of these positions has certain expectations attached to it. The center is expected to snap the ball, the quarterback to pass it, the guards to block, the tackles to tackle or block, the ends to receive passes, and so on. Those role expectations guide each player's actions; that is, the players try to do what their particular role requires.

1. Underline the key terms.

2. Who or what is the topic of this passage?

.....

3. What point is the author trying to make?

.....

4. What is the main idea of the passage?

.....

B. The Sangha in Thailand consists of about 200,000 monks and 85,000 novices most of the year. However, these numbers increase during the Buddhist 'lent' to 300,000 monks and 100,000 novices. Young boys may become novices at any age, but they cannot become monks until they reach the age of twenty or over. They can then remain monks for as long as they wish, even for just one day. Three months is more usual, although some choose to remain in monkhood for the rest of their lives.

(Adapted from buddhanet.net)

1. Underline the key terms.

2. Who or what is the topic of this passage?

.....

3. What point is the author trying to make?

.....

4. What is the main idea of the passage?

.....

C. The people seem to be in love with the idea of going out to eat. Because of this, a real variety of restaurants has come about specializing in all kinds of food. McDonald's is the king of a subgroup of restaurants called fast-food restaurants, no matter where you live, there is a McDonald's restaurant near you. There are even McDonald's in the mall or others. Now McDonald's is trying something new. It is called McDonald's Express.

1. Underline the key terms.

2. Who or what is the topic of this passage?

.....

3. What point is the author trying to make?

.....

4. What is the main idea of the passage?

.....

D. The movie “Phra Narasuan” was a part of Thai history. It is an exciting story about Phra Naresuan who gave freedom to the Thais in Ayutthaya period. King Naresuan of Ayutthaya Kingdom, is known as Phra Ong Dum. In the movie, the “Phra Ong Dum” who was the son of king of Ayutthaya (Maha Tammaraja) was a hostage of a Bago’s king.

1. Underline the key terms.

2. Who or what is the topic of this passage?

.....

3. What point is the author trying to make?

.....

4. What is the main idea of the passage?

.....