Unit 3 • Module 2:
Identifying Main Ideas in Text

Section 1

Slide 1—Title Slide

Welcome to the second module in the Comprehension Instructional Routines unit, Identifying Main Ideas in Text.

Slide 2—Comprehension Strategies Across Content Areas

Students need support before, during, and after reading in order to understand and learn from content area texts. In this module, we will focus on providing a brief preview of text *before* reading and identifying main ideas and details *during* reading. In the next module, we will address summarizing what we have learned *after* reading.

Locate **Handout 1: TEKS Connections**. Keep this handout available to review how the content of the module relates to the standards for your content area.

Slide 3—Objectives

The objectives for this module are: to understand how providing support in identifying main ideas during reading improves students' comprehension of text; to construct a Notes Log to teach students how to identify critical information in paragraphs and determine the main idea; and to learn how to apply the three-step process for explicit instruction to the implementation of the Notes Log for identifying main ideas and details.

As we begin the module, you may hear or see terms with which you are unfamiliar. These will be explained as we work through the slides.

Section 2

Slide 4—Supporting Comprehension by Identifying Main Ideas During Reading

Note-taking has benefits for all students because it affects how well they learn challenging material. Even some college students must be taught methods for efficiently and effectively taking notes, particularly when not provided with study guides or other advance organizers.

Here we do not address taking notes from lectures, as is more common in college, but we will be using a type of graphic organizer, called the Notes Log, to help students organize important information from the text.

Slide 5—Supporting Comprehension by Identifying Main Ideas During Reading (cont.)

If students can identify or infer main ideas in a text, they will be better able to understand and remember important information. It is wrong to assume that advanced students or students in secondary schools have already mastered the ability to identify and write main ideas. In fact, research indicates that it is as text becomes increasingly complex that most people need to be taught strategies for identifying and writing main ideas.

Slide 6—Notes Log: Previewing

Please locate **Handout 2: Notes Log Template.**

The Notes Log is the graphic organizer we will use to preview text *before* reading and to record main ideas and details *during* reading.

We will then return to the log one more time *after* reading to help students summarize what they've learned.

When you begin implementing the Notes Log, work with only one paragraph at a time to help students understand how and when they should use the routine. At the end of this module, we will discuss how to use the routine with a passage or longer portions of text.

The section of the Notes Log highlighted in this slide is the Previewing section. Previewing is the first step in identifying the main idea of a text.

Slide 7—Previewing: Modeling Phase: *I Do*

There are four steps to follow during the modeling phase (or the *I DO* stage) of previewing.

First, use the vocabulary instructional routine you learned in Unit 2 to introduce important vocabulary words. Part of previewing includes selecting the academic and content-specific words to teach students, pronouncing those words, and providing student-friendly definitions. Pay particular attention to the proper nouns in the text.

Next, record the title or topic and the page numbers for the chapter or section. This will provide a quick reference for students when they return to the Notes Log on subsequent days of instruction.

Slide 8—Previewing: Modeling Phase: *I Do* (cont.)

Step 3: State the primary focus of the chapter or section and explain how it connects to students' prior learning. Identify the most important thing you want students to understand and remember from the reading. This is also the time to help students understand how the information in this chapter or section relates to previous lessons.

Then, "think aloud" as you look at the text. It may be necessary to define and give examples of the textual features, such as titles, headings, photographs, and illustrations. For example, you might say, "I notice the word *climate* is on almost every page," or "There are headings in bold font that include the names of angles," or "This page has a bar graph showing the number of U.S. immigrants per decade."

Slide 9—Main Idea Instructional Routine

After providing a brief preview, there are three more steps to the Main Idea Instructional Routine. In step 2, you begin reading the text and identifying the main ideas. Next, we will learn to record these statements and their corresponding details on the Notes Log and compose a Main Idea of the Section statement.

Section 3

Slide 10—Notes Log: Main Idea

The middle section of the Notes Log is based on a two-column notetaking method. Students compose main idea statements for each paragraph in the left column and record any additional details related to that main idea in the right column.

Slide 11—Notes Log: Main Idea: Mathematics Sample

Please locate **Handout 3: Notes Log: Identifying Main Ideas: Mathematics Sample**.

This handout provides samples with the Previewing and Main Idea/Details steps completed. Notice that the details are aligned with the main ideas to which they relate. That is how we will practice completing these portions of the Notes Log during this module.

Slide 12—Main Idea: Modeling Phase: *I Do*

As you move to the Main Ideas and Notes sections of the log, explain the purpose for identifying the main idea.

Remind students of the primary focus for the chapter or section and how it connects to their prior learning.

Finally, read a paragraph of the text and model the Main Idea routine.

Slide 13—Main Idea: Modeling Phase: *I Do* (cont.)

We will use a strategy called Get the Gist to identify main ideas of paragraphs and later to find main ideas of passages or longer sections of text. The steps are listed in **Handout 4**.

Explain the steps of Get the Gist to your students as you model, using a paragraph from the text. Make sure to explain that you will identify the main idea of the paragraph using the Get the Gist routine.

First, determine whether the paragraph is about a "who" or a "what." Name the "who" or "what" that the paragraph is mostly about, or the topic of the paragraph.

Next, list the most important information about the "who" or "what," leaving out insignificant or smaller details. Use the guiding questions (has what/is what/does what?) to help locate the most important information about the topic.

Finally, say it in a complete sentence that is 10 words or less. The "who" or "what" counts as only 1 of those 10 words, even if it is written in more words.

This guide is used to help students learn how to compose concise and appropriate main ideas but should not be considered a hard-and-fast rule.

Slide 14—Main Idea: Modeling Phase: *I Do* (cont.)

Let's review the steps of Get the Gist in more detail.

Step 1: Name the "who" or "what" of the paragraph in as few words as possible.

The "who" or "what" must be specific and not include anything that the "who" or "what" is doing in the paragraph.

Please locate **Handout 5: "Physical Location of North America"** and take a moment to read it.

　　　The speaker pauses for 30 seconds.

I'll model how to think aloud to identify the "who" or "what" of the sample paragraph: "As I read this paragraph, I noticed that *North America* is repeated many times. It's in the title, and then it is used seven more times in the paragraph. The whole paragraph has something to do with North America. I think that must be the 'what.'" The slide contrasts the correct example

(North America) with an incorrect example (what caused North America to be difficult for people to reach).

Slide 15—Main Idea: Modeling Phase: *I Do* (cont.)

Step 2: Tell the most important information about the "who" or "what" in the paragraph. Listen as I think aloud to determine the most important information: "The paragraph talks a lot about how North America has water all around it. When it describes how people were kept away or how unique plants and animals developed, it was because North America was isolated by the oceans. That is the most important thing. It's what helps the other information in the paragraph make sense and fit together."

The correct example on the slide identifies the most important information about the "what," which is that it is isolated by ocean waters. Contrast that answer with the incorrect example: "It is bordered by the Arctic Ocean to the north, the Gulf of Mexico to the south, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east."

These are important details but don't belong in the main idea. They should later be recorded in the right column, or Notes section, of the Notes Log.

Slide 16—Main Idea: Modeling Phase: *I Do* (cont.)

Step 3: Say it in 10 words or less. Listen while I think aloud: "Now I have to write the gist of the paragraph in 10 words or less. I figured out that it was about North America and how the continent was isolated by ocean waters for a long time. Let's see…I want to make sure I explain how the oceans helped isolate it. How about: 'The ocean waters were all around North America?' No, I have to get to the part about it being isolated for a long time. What if I said: 'The waters surrounding North America isolated it for many years.' That would work!"

Remember that the "who" or "what" counts as only one word, even if it takes several words to identify. Our "what" was stated in two words: "North America." However, we will count the phrase as only one word when tabulating the total number of words in the sentence. The incorrect example on the slide includes details referring to the unique plants and animals as well as to the difficulty in reaching the continent. These details can be included in the Notes section rather than as part of the main idea.

When introducing the Get the Gist routine to students, be sure to model how you identified the "who" or "what," found the most important information about the "who" or "what," and composed the gist statement. Just as I did, think aloud while modeling how to complete each step.

Slide 17—Main Idea: Modeling Phase: *I Do* (cont.)

Any important details that were not used in the main idea statement can be put in the Notes section. This is where you would write about specific oceans, unique plants and animals, the protection from attack, and any other significant information mentioned in the sample paragraph.

Features of the previewed text—such as items in bold, italics, lists, captions, and graphs or charts—now become sources of information for the notes.

Teaching students to recognize important details will require repeated modeling. Thinking aloud is critical: It shows students how to consider details in the text and how to reason whether those details are important to the topic at hand.

The following video shows a science teacher using the Notes Log in a lesson on climate change. As you watch the video, pay attention to the ways in which the teacher scaffolds her students' learning. What do you observe the students doing that indicates they know what they are supposed to do and why?

Video: Main Idea: Get the Gist Routine (3:11)

Section 4

Slide 18—Notes Log: Main Idea: Social Studies Sample

Please locate **Handout 6: Notes Log: Identifying Main Ideas: Social Studies Sample.**

This handout shows how the Notes Log will look when the Main Idea and Notes sections are completed for an entire passage on the geographic factors that influenced the development of North America. Follow along as we look at each section of the handout.

Notice how the middle section can be expanded to accommodate longer sections of text. The amount of information included here reflects the teacher's version of the Notes Log. Use your professional judgment to determine what to expect of your students.

The Notes Log is a structured way for students to record the basic ideas, but it will still be necessary for you to help students consider the significance of this information.

Handout 7: Identifying Main Ideas in Text provides a compilation of the steps presented in this module and can be used for your reference.

Slide 19—Practice Identifying Main Ideas and Details in Text

Please turn to **Handout 8: Physical and Chemical Properties.**

So far, we have been looking at only completed samples without seeing the text from which the main ideas and details were drawn. To help you understand how this routine will work with your students, practice identifying the main ideas and details in a short passage. Read "Physical and Chemical Properties" to yourself and then write one Get the Gist statement and record the important details on the Notes Log provided with the passage. Remember to use the steps of the routine.

Section 5

Slide 20—Main Idea of the Section

While students are still learning to write main ideas and use the Get the Gist routine, it's important they work paragraph by paragraph. As they become more adept at using the routine, they should learn to group paragraphs and write main ideas for connected sections of text.

Handout 9: Moving From Paragraph Level to Increasingly Longer Sections of Text provides guidance on how you might divide passages as you support students in processing lengthier text.

Slide 21—Notes Log: English Language Arts Sample

Please turn to **Handout 10: Notes Log: Identifying Main Ideas: English Language Arts Samples.** Note the highlighted part of the slide. This is where the overall Main Idea of the section is recorded.

It's not necessary to complete the main idea of the section on every assignment. Whether you have students "Get the Gist" for paragraphs, sections, or chapters will depend on the objective of your lesson.

Like all samples in this module, the English language arts Notes Logs reflect teachers' versions. It is not expected that middle school students would produce this amount of detail, so use your professional judgment to determine the amount of information appropriate for students to include.

These samples include lines dividing the Main Idea and Notes sections. This form of scaffolding shows students how many main ideas to generate for the passage.

Slide 22—Notes Log: Science Sample

Now turn to **Handout 11: Notes Log: Identifying Main Ideas: Science Samples.** These sample logs have main ideas for paragraphs as well as main ideas for the entire section of text.

Depending on your text and the level of detail with which you want students to use the Notes Log, you may or may not choose to complete the main idea of the section. In mathematics, for example, there is often a lack of connected text long enough or comprehensive enough to make writing a main idea of the section practical.

Slide 23—Scaffolding

Please turn to **Handout 12: Scaffolding the Identification of Main Ideas in Text,** which lists the scaffolding steps presented on this slide.

Some students may need additional support in previewing complex text. Struggling students have a tendency not to list enough information in the Notes column, while advanced students have a tendency to list too much. It's often useful to give students a suggested number of details to find in the paragraph or passage until they have a better sense of how much information is appropriate.

Information recorded in the Notes Log does not have to be in the form of words. Pictures, symbols, and diagrams may be more appropriate for the content or may better address the language proficiency of your students.

The Notes Log can also be modified by creating sections with completed portions already on the page. This can help reduce the language or cognitive demands and afford students an opportunity to concentrate on key concepts.

Complete a "teacher key" of the Notes Log so you can anticipate problems students might have and determine the amount of information you could reasonably expect them to identify. You may even choose to return to modeling if you know a particular section will be too difficult for students to complete on their own.

Of course, you don't want to force students through the tedious steps of the routine forever. Eventually, you want students to be able to grasp the main idea without having to use Get the Gist.

Students will eventually develop their own processes for generating the main ideas and details. Some may find it useful to record the details, or notes, as they read and then compose main idea statements for sections of their notes after reading. This is an acceptable adaptation of the instructional routine that reflects student ownership of the Notes Log.

Slide 24—Summary

We have reached the end of this module.

The objectives of this module were: to understand how providing support in identifying main ideas during reading improves students' comprehension of text; to construct a Notes Log to teach students how to identify critical information in paragraphs and determining the main idea; and to successfully apply the three-step process for explicit instruction to the implementation of the Notes Log for identifying main ideas and details.

Handout 13: Notes Log Templates provides two versions of the log to use as a classroom master. One version has all sections on a single page, and the other has the Main Idea and Notes sections expanded to two pages.