Reading Comprehension Tip Sheet

**Reading Comprehension Involves:**
- Understanding patterns of organization and structure
- Developing vocabulary (attached handouts)
- Determining topic, main points and supporting details

**Patterns of Organization and Structure:**

Why is it important to understand the structure of reading material?
- Better understand writer’s purpose and main point(s)
- Helps with overall comprehension if you know how all the components of a passage are working together
- Can predict what is coming next in a work
- Can help improve reading rate
  - If you can guess what’s coming next, you can read faster through those sections

There are several patterns of organizational structure – see page 3 of this handout.

**Topics and Main Ideas**

In order to really understand your reading material, you need to comprehend and distinguish between:
- The topic of a reading passage
- The main idea of a passage (including finding the topic sentence of a paragraph)
- The supporting details
- Implied main idea

**Topic**
General subject under discussion in a reading passage
Unifies and generalizes about details in the passage
Answers question, “What is this passage about?”

**Main Idea**
Author’s key point about the topic
Authors make several points, but they typically have one controlling idea or thesis.
Analogy: The topic is like a book title. The main idea is the central point of the book.

**Identifying the Main Idea**
What is the topic?
  - Use headings and ask questions to identify topic
What point is the author trying to make about the topic?
  - Is he/she trying to argue or prove something?
  - List details or examples that the author’s uses. What do these have in common?
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Look for general statements within the first or second paragraph which will tell you what point the author is trying to make.
The main idea should be a complete statement – not a word or phrase (like the topic)

Structure of a paragraph
A paragraph is text that contains a discussion about one idea/concept/topic
Topic sentence – main idea of that paragraph
  Topic sentences can be places at the beginning, middle or end of a paragraph
  (or not stated directly at all)
Supporting details make up the rest of the paragraph:
  Used to develop and explain main idea
  Include examples, definitions, explanations and reasons

Implied Main Ideas
Not all main ideas in a passage or paragraph is stated directly
Many main ideas are implied or inferred
Why do writers do this?
  Think that the meaning is obvious
  Want readers to think for themselves
It is up to the reader to figure out, to infer, meaning from passages
  Inference – conclusion drawn from evidence

Figuring Out Implied Main Ideas: 5 steps
Step One
  Read passage (annotate thoughts)
Step Two
  What is the paragraph’s topic (NOT main idea)?
Step Three
  Reflect on the details used in the passage. Why did the author choose those details? What point is the author trying to make about those details?
Step Four
  What is the tone or feeling of the passage? Is the author’s tone positive or negative?
Step Five
  Write a complete sentence that asserts something about the details.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern or Strategy</th>
<th>Key Signal Words</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Listing/Addition:</strong> The simple presentation of information, one item at a time.</td>
<td>Also, and, another, finally, first, furthermore, in addition, last, likewise, moreover, next, second, third</td>
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<td><strong>Examples:</strong> Use of specifics to illustrate and clarify a statement</td>
<td>For example, for instance, that is, e.g., to illustrate</td>
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<td><strong>Definition:</strong> Explanation of the meaning of a word, concept, or term</td>
<td>Means, that is, is, or; corresponds to, is literally Use of <strong>bold</strong> or <strong>italic</strong> type print</td>
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<td><strong>Ordering: Chronology and Process:</strong> Explaining by using time sequence, emphasizing the order in which something took place or must be followed.</td>
<td>After, before, finally, first, following, last, later, next, now, second, then, thereupon, until, when</td>
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<td><strong>Comparison and Contrast:</strong> Discussion of similarities or differences of two items or events or ideas</td>
<td>Both, compared with, different, however, in contrast, in the same way, likewise, on the other hand, similarly</td>
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<td><strong>Statement with Clarification:</strong> Explanation of a fact or idea with further discussion, including restating or expanding upon the idea</td>
<td>Also, clearly, evidently, in fact, in other words, obviously, of course, that is, thus, too</td>
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<td><strong>Cause and Effect:</strong> The reasons for an event or situation; the consequences of an action or condition.</td>
<td>Causes: because, because of, for since, stems from, one cause is, one reason is, leads to, causes, creates, yields, produces, due to, breeds, for this reason Effects: consequently results in, one result is, therefore, thus, as a result, hence</td>
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<td><strong>Problem/Solution Strategy:</strong> This writing strategy typically states the problem in the first part of the passage and then offers one or more solutions and the reasons why these solutions would work.</td>
<td>Problem, solution, answers, crisis, issues</td>
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<td><strong>Classification:</strong> Explanation of how ideas, events, or items fit into categories, e.g., organizing a society by income, levels or by age groups, or educational level</td>
<td>Category, rank, group, types, parts</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summary:</strong> A restatement, in brief form, of the main points of a longer passage</td>
<td>In brief, in short, to sum up, to conclude</td>
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