

COLLEGE READING COMPREHENSION

Recognizing and Organizing Main and Supporting Ideas

Before you begin, ask at the front desk for a TUTOR to work with you after your first 30-45 minutes of independent work. FIND A LARGE TABLE TO WORK AT, A RECTANGULAR ONE IF POSSIBLE.

MATERIALS:

- Essay "The Only Way To Have a Cow" by Bill McKibben
- Ruled notebook paper
- Thesis Statement sheet (white paper)
- Cut-up sentences (colored paper)

INSTRUCTIONS:

This exercise will give you practice in reading comprehension and outlining. This method will work for any reading you do in college.

First- Read the essay carefully. As you read, make annotations on a sheet of notebook paper (included in the envelope). Do this for every paragraph, noting **A)** the paragraph's *main idea(s)* in your own words, and **B)** any other *thoughts, ideas, experiences, or connections* the reading triggers in you.

Second - On the same sheet of paper, write in your own words a sentence stating what you see as the THESIS, or MAIN POINT, of the article.

Third - Now read the white sheet (in the envelope) of 3 possible THESIS STATEMENTS for the essay. **A)** Make your choice and write down the number. **B)** Make a note about how your thesis statement compares and/or contrasts with the one you chose from the 3 samples.

Fourth - At an empty table, lay out the cut-up sentences (directly on the surface of the table) according to how you think an outline of the reading should look. Lay out the strips of paper in a **hierarchical** order with what you see as supporting points *indented* below what you see as the main points. **Feel free to stand up and move around while doing this as you shift around the separate strips of papers.**

Note: NOT ALL the sentences are major ones that would be included in an outline of this reading, and some of the sentences are inaccurate to the reading. Leave those out of your plan.

WORK WITH TUTOR

When you have completed all of the above, you can begin your TUTORING SESSION. Ask the tutor to come to your table.

First - As your tutor looks at your note paper with you, read aloud your annotations. Explain to the tutor why you wrote each note; which of the following were you doing? A) summarizing the main idea, or B) stating your own thoughts, ideas, experiences, connections.

Second - Read to your tutor the THESIS STATEMENT you wrote. Tell the tutor which of the 3 sample thesis statements you chose as the best one. Explain why you chose it, and explain how it compares/contrasts with the one you wrote. Examine the following: 1) Is the sentence accurate to McKibbons' main point? If not, what is *inaccurate* about it? 2) How comprehensive is your sentence (that is, does it adequately cover the main point)? If not, what important material is it missing? 3) Does it state a *minor* idea rather than the *main* idea of the essay? If so, what do you think led you to do this?

Third - With your tutor, go over the outline you constructed on the table. Do you or the tutor find anything that seems out of place? If so, HOW and WHY is it misplaced? What might be a better arrangement?

Fourth - Take no more than 5 minutes to write a different THESIS STATEMENT that OPPOSES McKibbons' viewpoint in his article. Make sure this sentence or two states not only the opposing viewpoint, but lists 2 or 3 supporting reasons or points that could be discussed about it. Go over this sentence with your tutor; look for the accuracy and logic of the opposing view, the relevance of the supporting points, and the clarity of the sentences.

Finally - **Use this method of annotation and outlining on the next reading you do for a class.** In doing so, you will MAKE YOUR OWN OUTLINE of the reading and write the MAIN IDEA in one or two sentences of your own (don't copy from the text itself!). If you want a tutor to go over this work with you, bring it to the Learning Center. You will find that if you practice this, you will start reading more accurately and specifically. You will also remember the reading well and be able to apply it successfully to the papers you write.