***Critical Thinking Skills  
Finding the Main Ideas***

Each paragraph or group of paragraphs in our text book has a main idea and supporting details. Finding the main idea is an important skill. It helps you to understand what you have read.

The main idea usually appears in a topic sentence. The topic sentence is often the first sentence of the paragraph. However, a topic sentence may also be at the beginning or at the end of the paragraph.

Read the essay below, and follow the steps to find the main ideas.

**Religion and the Bill of Rights**

Many Americans in 1789 worried that the new Constitution contained no protection for religious freedom. Without such written protection, they feared, their freedom to worship would not be secure. They called on the new government to adopt a bill of rights that would guarantee freedom of religion.

Religious leaders joined the battle for a bill of rights. Among them was Moses Brown, a Quaker leader from Rhode Island. Brown refused to support ratification of the Constitution until he received a promise that a bill of rights would be added. Baptist minister John Leland of Virginia and Bishop John Carroll of Maryland made similar stands in the states.

President Washington supported the efforts of these leaders. He wrote, “Every man… out to be protected in worshiping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.” He promised that the new government would support religious freedom.

Religious freedom became law in 1791. In that year, the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution. The First Amendment guaranteed religious freedom by stating, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

1. **Identify the main idea of each paragraph**
2. What is the main idea of the first paragraph? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Which sentence best expresses the main idea? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Which sentence in the second paragraph states the main idea? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. **Identify supporting details**
2. What is the main idea of the third paragraph? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What two details support this main idea? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What are the supporting details in the fourth paragraph? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. **Determine the main idea of the essay.**

The main idea of the essay is the sum of the main ideas of the main ideas of the paragraphs. The main ideas of the paragraphs serve as supporting details for the main idea of the essay.

1. What is the main idea of “Religion and the Bill of Rights?” \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. What details support this main idea? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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