INFORMATION AND IDEAS / 01 UNDERSTAND

Central ideas

An illustrated lesson ▪ Theory, reasoning and worked examples

A topic is not yet a central idea

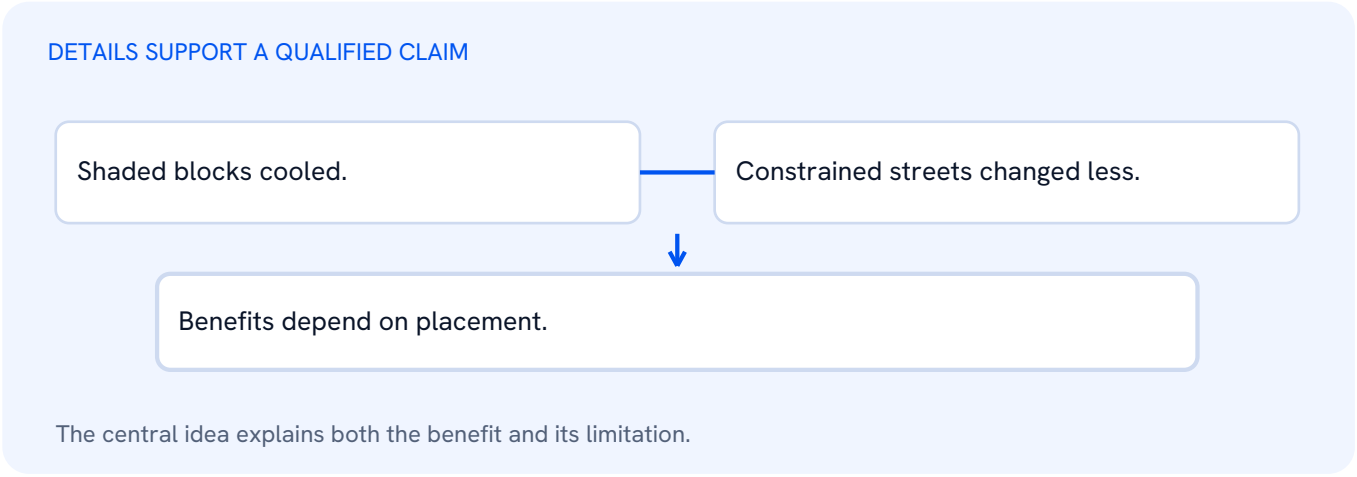
The topic names what the passage concerns; the central idea states what the passage says about that topic. Urban trees is a topic. Urban trees can reduce neighbourhood temperatures, but their benefits depend on placement is a claim. A strong summary includes the main relationship, not merely a subject label.

Distinguish claims from support

Examples, measurements and anecdotes usually support a broader point. Ask what those details work together to establish. One sentence may state that point directly, but it may also emerge across the passage. A vivid example is not automatically the main idea simply because it is easy to remember.

Scope controls the answer

The correct central idea covers the important parts without adding claims the passage does not make. An answer can be factually true yet too narrow because it mentions only one example. Another can be too broad because it generalizes a local result to every place, time or situation.



Illustrative teaching diagram. Values and examples are explained in the lesson.

THE ESSENTIAL IDEA

The central idea captures the passage as a whole.

INFORMATION AND IDEAS / 02 BUILD THE METHOD

From idea to method

Summarize the paragraph's movement

Briefly label each part: introduces a claim, gives evidence, presents a limitation, or offers a conclusion. This reveals how the sentences fit together. A passage that begins with an old explanation and ends by challenging it is primarily about that challenge, not merely the old explanation.

Preserve the author's qualification

Words such as may, in this setting and only when narrow a claim. If the author says a method can help under certain conditions, a summary saying it always succeeds is too strong. The main idea must keep important limitations even when shorter wording would sound more decisive.

Test all important details

For each candidate summary, ask whether the central examples and conclusion make sense as support for it. If a key sentence would seem irrelevant under that summary, the candidate may be missing the passage's point. Do not demand that a summary repeat every detail; it should explain why the details belong together.

WORKED EXAMPLE / A CLAIM WITH A LIMITATION

A city planted trees to reduce summer heat. Shaded blocks cooled, but narrow streets with little planting space changed less. Planners began prioritizing locations where trees could grow large canopies.

01 Set up the reasoning

The topic is urban tree planting. The supporting contrast is between blocks with effective shade and constrained streets.

02 Apply the relationship

The final action responds to that contrast: placement affects the benefits of the intervention.

03 Interpret and check

A suitable central idea is that trees can reduce urban heat, but site conditions influence their effectiveness. Saying trees eliminate heat would overstate the passage.

INFORMATION AND IDEAS / 03 CONNECT & REMEMBER

See the deeper pattern

Purpose and central idea are related but distinct

Central idea asks what the passage says. Purpose asks what the author is doing, such as explaining a finding, challenging a view or comparing methods. When a question asks about one sentence's function, identify how that sentence contributes to the passage rather than restating the whole central idea.

ONE MORE WORKED APPLICATION

Mira tested 9 designs for a container. The lightest design broke under pressure; a heavier design remained intact. The final choice balanced weight and strength. What is the central idea?

1. Weight and strength both affected the choice.

2. Focusing only on the broken design would omit the decision described at the end.

Answer: The design choice required balancing two competing properties.

Mistakes to recognize

- Do not select a narrow detail just because it is explicitly stated.
- Keep the author's uncertainty and limitations.
- The first sentence may introduce a view the passage later rejects.

A quick understanding check

What must a central idea include beyond the topic?

Explanation: The passage's main claim or relationship concerning that topic.

MORE PRACTICE IN YOUR DASHBOARD

Open prepvora.com/app/ and use the SAT question bank. Work on Information and Ideas, then look for central ideas questions. Solve independently before reviewing the explanation. Use this guide for the theory; use the dashboard for a longer practice session.

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