FINDING THE MAIN IDEA

Directions: This exercise is designed to give you practice in finding main ideas and drawing diagrams. Read each paragraph carefully. Decide on the main idea. If the main idea is split, list the numbers of both sentences. If the main idea is not stated, leave the blank unmarked. Below each main idea blank, draw the correct diagram. Work rapidly.

1. In 1938 the trumpeter swan population had fallen to 1,931 birds, and by 1949 only 500 were known to exist in the United States. 2) In 1958 the number of whooping cranes was down to 31 known birds, and there were only 60 California condors. 3) These are but three examples of birds that have approached extinction and even now remain at such low levels that continuing existence is uncertain.

2. Finding words in the dictionary would be an easy task if the entire list followed strict alphabetical order. 2) by using the guide words on the upper outside corners of the pages, the general position of the desired word could be determined very quickly. 3) Then locating the word would be a mere matter of alphabetization. 4) But not all dictionaries follow the ironclad rule of alphabetical order, and the exceptions are sometimes confusing.

3. Parsley formed the crown with which Hercules crowned himself as conqueror of the Numea lion. 2) Cabbage was used by the Egyptians, as was also garlic, the leaf and the onion. 3) There are many other historical references to the use of plants and plant life hundreds of years before the discovery of America. 4) Alexander the Great probably introduced the string bean into Europe for the fields of India. 5) Asparagus came from Asia and the Romans cultivated it with such success that stalks were raised which weighed three pounds each. 6) The olive tree was venerated for its fruit, which was used as an hors d’oeuvre to clear the palate, and for its oil, which took the place of butter.

4. When we are frustrated in satisfying a need or desire we may react by mobilizing skills and energies we might otherwise never have used. 2) A businessman who is frustrated by stagefright whenever he must address a conference may devote special efforts to overcome this handicap and consequently may become an outstanding public speaker. 3) Similarly, someone with a slight physical defect may undergo special training to compensate for it and so develop into a competent athlete. 4) It follows, therefore, that when we increase our efforts to resolve a frustrating situation, additional skills we develop may open up for us new areas to explore, areas we might not otherwise have considered ourselves capable of entering. 5) Thus, our frustrating experience will have produced constructive results.

5. The wildlife of this country has been subject to increasing pressure ever since the first settlement was founded. 2) On the injured lands and in polluted waters the wild animal population cannot approach what it once was. 3) Commercial hunters of the past have made phenomenal killings of game. 4) It would be very rare for a hunter today to encounter an area where such kills would be possible. 5) The hauls of commercial fishermen have been fairly well tabulated for many decades. 6) Many preferred fish, such as Atlantic salmon, the shad, and lake herring, have almost disappeared from the nets.

6. A good example of the influence of structure on the properties of a material is furnished by graphite and diamond. 2) Both materials contain only one element, carbon. 3) Graphite, which is used in ordinary pencils, is a soft, flaky material that can be spread out easily in a thin film. 4) Diamond, on the other hand, is a very hard material that can be used for grinding and cutting. 5) The differences in the properties of graphite and diamond spring from the differences in the arrangements of the atoms. 6) In graphite the carbon atoms are joined together in a two-dimensional structure like a flat sheet. 7) In diamond the carbon atoms are lined together to form a three-dimensional rigid structure.
7. Social roles carry a whole complex pattern of expectations.  2) The doctor knows what is expected of him and his patients know how they are to act.  3) Folkways and mores are also group expectations, but they are more than general social roles.  4) The latter are attached to a general position in society and are more or less independent of the person who happens to be occupying the position at the moment.  5) The lawyer has a certain role as a lawyer, but not as John Smith.  6) Teachers and pupils have clusters of expectations attached to their positions, and these expectations guide them in their behavior in the appropriate roles.  7) Every society has dozens of these generalized patterns, and some societies have thousands of them.  8) When each person acts in accordance with his role(s), the group functions smoothly.

8. The noise of the summer crowds has faded into silence in the hazy valleys; picnic tables stand deserted in fallen leaves; and the distant peaks, already sleeping softly under early snows, are framed by scarlet branches.  2) The high alpine meadows of Cascade and Coast ranges, studded with jewel-clear lakes, are splashed with red and gold from mid-September until well into October, when huckleberry and mountain ash are turning.  3) At lower elevations, big leaf maple and dogwood gradually add their yellows and gold to the scene; and along meandering streams deep in the woods, shafts of light strike in the yellow cottonwood trees.

9. The climate of Antarctica is as unusual as the terrain.  2) Temperatures can be extremely low.  3) A temperature of -127.5 has been registered, but, as meteorological stations are still very few there, and continuous records at these extend only over a few years, lower temperatures may yet be recorded.  4) Most of the winds blow offshore.  5) As cold air is unable to hold as much water vapor as warmer air, the extremely low temperatures and the lack of large ingress of moist and warmer air combine to make the atmosphere over the Antarctic continent extremely dry.  6) Precipitation is in the form of snow, but this is equivalent to only five inches of rainfall per year on the average of widely scattered measurements.

10. One of the skills of study in which students are confessedly deficient is the skill of reading, which is now seen to be a more complex activity than was formerly thought.  2) All students can read, but it is clear that many lack “functional literacy” and are unable to read in ways conducive to success in university studies.  3) Some textual material must be read analytically and worked over carefully.  4) Exactness of comprehension, or depth of appreciation, or both, is the object.  5) The description of a complex process in physics of the development of a chain of arguments in logic or political theory is not to be rushed by the serious student seeking mastery and fullness of understanding.  6) Again, it is absurd to suppose that writing of literary quality can be savored at speed.  7) The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah of the ”Ode to the Nightingale”, like great music, have their appropriate tempo, and to read them, even silently, at a faster pace, is to outrage both the ear and the mind.