

Functional Skills

English

Level 2 Reading R2b

Examine Texts' Primary Themes v1.0

Functional Skills English:

Level 2

Skill Standard:

Reading R2b

Coverage and Range:

'Learners should be able to... examine surveys/questionnaires, consultation responses or submitted results for primary themes, main concerns and so on.'¹

¹ QCA Functional Skills guidance: amplification of the standards June 2008 QCA/08/3700

Examining Texts' Primary Themes

In your exam you may be asked to find the main point of a particular text or paragraph. Although point and purpose do differ, there are several straightforward steps that you can take to help you determine what the correct answers are.

Finding the Main Point

The main point is the most important idea that the writer is trying to get across to the reader. When you read a text, ask yourself what is the overall message being given by the author. Whatever the main point of a text is, it will likely be expressed in the headline and be subsequently referred to – explicitly and implicitly – in the remainder. If you're hunting for the main point in a paragraph, typically it will appear in what is known as the *topic sentence*; remember, though, that this need not always appear first.

The best way of telling the difference between a text's main and subsidiary points/details is to first read it carefully and then go through it again and highlight the most crucial sentence(s). By doing this you will get an overall idea of the case the author is making, and thereby be able to see which of the points is key and which are used for reinforcement and support.

Example

Fluent English key to job hunt

More than three quarters of a million people in England and Wales speak English so poorly that they are likely to find it difficult to get work, according to official figures published yesterday.

Nine out of ten people said English was their main language. Of the rest, almost three million (6.4 per cent) said they could speak English "well" or "very well", while 785,000 said they spoke it poorly including 138,000 who were unable to speak English or Welsh.

People who are not proficient in English had a lower rate of employment and were more likely to be in low-level jobs than those with English as their main language, according to analysis of the 2011 census released yesterday.

Half of those aged 16-64 whose English was poor or worse were in work compared with 71 per cent of those whose main language was English and 65 per cent of those who could speak English well or very well, the Office for National Statistics said.

A third of women with poor or no English were working compared with 68 per cent of men. Half of the women who were not working were "looking after home or family".

1. What is the main point of this article?

From the headline alone we can see that, rather simply, fluent English is essential when it comes to finding a job. We can furthermore justify the claim that this is the main point because the rest of the article is filled with supporting information, statistics and specific facts, none of which are themselves more important than this opening statement.

2. What is the main point of the fifth paragraph?

The chief point of this paragraph is to inform the reader that women with poor English skills were more than twice as likely to be out of work as men in a similar linguistic position.

Exercise 1

Read the article and then answer the questions that follow.

Earthquake Response Relief (E.R.R.)

Emergency Appeal

During the night of 12th July, a magnitude 8.5 earthquake struck the area in the immediate vicinity of Yakutsk, eastern Russia. Even though the locality is sparsely inhabited, the quake has caused numerous casualties and extensive damage.

According to early local reports received on long wave emergency radio transmitters, the vast majority of the housing stock and municipal buildings have been destabilised, with approximately a quarter of all buildings completely destroyed. The local TV transmitting tower has collapsed, as has the only bridge over the local river and the airport's sole control tower. Gas leaks and fires are widespread, and the power supply from the town's only generating station has failed.

Yakutsk (population 290,000) is the capital of the Sakha Republic, the biggest of all of Russia's internal regions and historically deemed part of Siberia. Despite its size and scale, it has fewer than 1 million people occupying an area just smaller than India (population 1,210 million).

There are also only two nearby cities (Chita and Khabarovsk), but this is a purely relative term as each of them is over 1,200 miles away. To make matters worse, the only motorway is on the eastern side of the river Lena, whilst the city is on the west. With the bridge destroyed and the airport out of action, at present the city is completely cut off.

We Need Your Help

The ERR has launched an emergency appeal to collect funds in aid of the people of Yakutsk. The situation is described dire and their plight as desperate. Whilst aid convoys will depart immediately for the site, we need to helicopter engineers in to repair the vital infrastructure that will allow the road-borne provisions to make it to the city.

Please give what you can. Thank you.

1) What is the **main point** of this article?

2) What is the **main point** of the third paragraph?

- a. To emphasise how remote the area is.
- b. To inform readers of the area's history.
- c. To emphasise how sparsely populated the area is.
- d. To inform readers of some background to the area.

Exercise 2

Read the article on the next page and then answer the questions below.

1) What is the **main point** of this article?

2) What is the **main point** of the sixth paragraph?

- a. To emphasise how accurate two of the energy companies were compared to the rest.
- b. To inform readers of what TCRs actually are.
- c. To emphasise how inaccurate the energy companies were in general.
- d. To inform readers of precisely how many calls were made, in order to give them an idea of the depth and breadth of the survey
- e. To explain how the investigators making the calls went about impersonating normal consumers.
- f. To prove that the 'Big Six' energy companies were targeted just as much as the smaller ones, thereby proving that there was no bias in the survey.

Consumers Who Want to Switch Still Confused by Energy Tariffs

- 1) Energy suppliers are failing to explain properly to households how to compare electricity and gas tariffs to get the best deal, an investigation has found.
- 2) Research by the consumer group Which? found that only in 5 per cent of cases are suppliers following guidelines that Ofgem introduced in April.
- 3) Given such misleading information, households could switch to a worse deal or decide to stick with their current tariff even though they would be better off elsewhere, the report found.
- 4) The findings deal another blow to the regulator's reforms, aimed at making the energy market fairer and simpler.
- 5) Under new guidelines, suppliers have to provide a tariff comparison rate, or TCR, a single figure to measure the cost of that particular tariff to help consumers to get the best deals. The rate combines the flat rate standing charge automatically charged to a household and the price of each unit of energy consumed. Ofgem has likened the TCR to the annual percentage rate that accompanies credit cards.
- 6) Investigators called 13 suppliers, including the Big Six companies, claiming to be normal consumers wanting to find out about their TCR rates. Of the 78 calls made, only four — 5 per cent — provided accurate information. Only npower and E.ON gave an accurate description of their TCRs and then in only two of the six calls they received.
- 7) Richard Lloyd of *Which?*, said: "If the energy companies can't even explain how to accurately compare tariffs, then their customers stand no chance. It is clear suppliers need to up their game and ensure they can provide consumers with a clear and accurate explanation to help them find the best deal."
- 8) The complexity of tariffs was cited by the regulator as one of the factors putting off households from switching.
- 9) Some tariffs have higher flat rate standing charges but lower unit prices, which would save money for households which use more energy. However, the TCR is calculated on households' average energy consumption, so a tariff with a low TCR might not be the best deal for these households.
- 10) In most cases suppliers did not explain to clients that the cheapest TCR for a particular tariff might not be the best deal for that caller, the investigation found.
- 11) Ofgem said: "Ofgem has already told suppliers that they must improve their customer service, so they have to make sure that their staff can properly explain the tariff comparison rate to their customers. We are monitoring compliance with these reforms closely."

Exercise 3

Read the article below and then answer the questions.

1) What is the **main point** of this article?

2) What is the **main point** of the second paragraph?

- a. To explain how dashcams work
- b. To argue in favour of the mandatory installation of dashcams
- c. To argue against the mandatory installation of dashcams.
- d. To tell the reader about the popularity of dashcams abroad, e.g. in Russia and Canada.
- e. To explain that dashcams' success elsewhere has sparked a debate in the UK about making them compulsory.
- f. To inform the reader that dashboard cameras could one day be considered as important as insurance or road tax.
- g. To question whether dashboard cameras could one day be considered as important as insurance or road tax.

Should Dashcams be Mandatory?

Driving is a risky business, with high insurance premiums, expensive cars and fuel, and more motorists on the road than ever before. If you're unlucky enough to be involved in an accident, the process of clearing your name is also often fraught with pitfalls, hearsay and conjecture, but what if you had video proof of your innocence?

Dashboard Cameras, or *dashcams*, are small recording devices that sit behind your car's windscreen to record a journey. Their popularity and success in countries like Russia, Canada and France, proving "innocence without witness", has opened a rather delicate debate as to whether they should be made mandatory in the UK. With arguments of safety, anti-corruption and legal evidence on one side, and privacy breach on the other, could dashboard cameras ever be considered as important as insurance or road tax?

Why Do We Need Dashcams?

From an insurance stance, dashcams can be an impartial view on a road traffic accident. After an RTA, people can often be unwilling to admit guilt and risk losing their no-claims discount by telling the truth. This can lead to a war of words resulting in reduced or settled insurance claims. There has also been a rise in fraudulent 'crash for cash' claims where criminals fake accidents involving cars, claiming medical compensation from the insurers. This then hikes the premium of the innocent car driver, often making their insurance policy unaffordable.

With the introduction of mandatory dashboard cameras, each driver could be asked to produce evidence based on their claim/defence, and as long as their cameras were on and recording, there would be impartial reviews available.

Anti-Corruption

The Russians have been the most enthusiastic users of dashcams, with an estimated 1 million registered owners using them as a form of backup surveillance against widespread police corruption and insurance fraud. That's why you'll find so many crazy road incidents like the 2013 meteor strike uploaded to YouTube, because the drivers are always *Russian* around!

Thankfully, in the UK, corruption and fraud are not at Russian levels, however it's believed that if all cars did have some form of surveillance, there would be extra chances of catching nearby crimes on camera, as well as them providing backup for drivers in court.

Scams, Accidents and Nature

Nor is it just the Russians equipping themselves with dashboard cameras. In North America, drivers are protecting themselves against lengthy legal battles by arming their cars with mini cameras to fight back against insurance firms.

In Canada, where the snow falls thick and rather large wildlife often roam the country roads, dashcams are a way of proving innocence without witnesses. With huge swathes of the country covered in snow almost year round, dashcams are often there to help settle disputes with insurers regarding reckless driving or acts of rather indecisive elk. In the USA meanwhile, swathes of *cash-for-crash* scams have scared large numbers of drivers into investing in on-board cameras.

The Privacy Argument

Not everyone is on-board with the dashcam revolution, though. The transport departments in Austria and Switzerland have gone as far as to ban dashcams, calling them an invasion of privacy, whilst a number of other countries including Germany do not admit dashcam footage as evidence in court, effectively rendering them useless.

In addition, tracking is another big bug-bear with critics. That's because many dashcams come equipped with GPS built-in, meaning your insurance company (or government) could theoretically see how fast and where you're driving to. This has led to claims of potential government tracking and restrictions on travel.

Good, Bad or Ugly?

If everyone had a camera, drivers might become more sensible as they would know they were being filmed. They would also allow for clear evidence in insurance claims - as long as the camera was on and facing the right direction. And there is an argument they could help stop cash-for-crash scams.

However sensible dashboard cameras seem, though, turning an arguably good idea into a mandatory law that would add to everyone's motoring expenses would surely fire people up the wrong way, notably as an incursion into privacy.

For now, in Britain, it's arguably for the best that the question of whether *to record or not to record* is one best answered by each driver individually.