

## Reading Informational Text

You are living in an age of information. In a matter of minutes, you can find magazine articles, Web sites, and blogs on just about any topic, from global warming to cell-phone technology. But how can you be sure you're getting the most out of what you're reading? What's the best way to wade through all those facts and figures? Learning a few strategies can help you navigate through a sea of information, find answers to your questions, and remember what you've learned.

### Part 1: Text Features

Time is money in the fast-paced, modern world. So, it's important to be able to find information quickly when you're searching through Web sites, books, and magazines. One way to locate useful information at a glance is to notice the text features writers use. **Text features** include titles, subheadings, captions, sidebars, boldfaced words, bulleted lists, and links. These elements allow you to see the most important ideas without having to read every word.

Consider the following article from the back of a "Fun Facts" pamphlet. By scanning the text features, you can anticipate what information the article includes before deciding to read further.



Included in this workshop:  
**READING 10** Analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about expository text. **10A** Summarize the main ideas, supporting details, and relationships among ideas in text. **10B** Evaluate inferences from their logic in text. **10C** Make subtle inferences and draw complex conclusions about the ideas in text and their organizational patterns.

**1** The **title** reveals the topic of the article—the history of hot dogs.

**2** **Subheadings** highlight what each section of the article is about.

**3** A **sidebar** provides more information.

**4** A **bulleted list** presents information in an easy-to-read format.

## The History of <sup>1</sup> Hot Dogs



### Hot Dogs in Europe <sup>2</sup>

There are several different theories about the origin of the hot dog. Traditionally, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, is credited with originating the frankfurter.

#### Hot Dog Specialties <sup>3</sup>

- 4** In the South, people like their hot dogs "dragged through the garden" with a cole-slaw type topping.
- New Yorkers like their hot dogs served with steamed onions and pale yellow mustard.
- Folks in Kansas City enjoy hot dogs with sauerkraut and Swiss cheese.

### All-American Dogs

Another story points to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904. A concessionaire sold hot dogs as plain sausages, and provided customers with white gloves for easier eating. After the gloves were not returned, he consulted a baker, who designed the "hot dog bun" to protect eaters' fingers.



One of the more credible stories comes from Barry Popick, a prominent hot dog historian at Roosevelt University. He claims the term began appearing in college magazines in the 1890s. Yale students kept referring to wagons selling hot sausages in buns outside their dorms as "dog wagons."

It didn't take long for the use of the word *dog* to become "hot dog."



## MODEL: TEXT FEATURES

Skim the text features in this Web article. What information do you think the article will provide? Now read the full article and answer the questions.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a blue header and a navigation bar. The navigation bar includes buttons for 'Articles', 'Games', 'Fun Facts', and 'Home'. The main content area features a large heading 'DANGER from the Sky' in green and black. Below the heading is a paragraph of text with a line number '5' on the left. To the right of the text is a photograph of a meteorite streaking across the sky. Below the photo is a link 'See More Photos' with a camera icon. Further down is a subheading 'Impacts on Earth' in blue and green, followed by two paragraphs of text with line numbers '10' and '15' on the left. Below this is another subheading 'Risk of a Meteorite Collision' in blue and green, followed by two paragraphs of text with line numbers '20' and '25' on the left. To the right of the 'Risk of a Meteorite Collision' section is a sidebar titled 'TRACKING ASTEROIDS' in bold black, containing a paragraph of text. At the bottom of the browser window, there is a status bar with the word 'Internet' and a globe icon.

### Close Read

1. If you were doing a report on meteorites, would this article be useful to you? Explain which text feature helped you find the answer.
2. Summarize the information that appears under the subheading “Impacts on Earth.” Write another subheading that the author could have used.
3. What additional information does the sidebar provide?

## Part 2: Main Idea and Supporting Details

After you preview a text, you're ready to examine it more closely. To do this well, you need to know how to identify main ideas and evaluate texts.

### IDENTIFYING MAIN IDEAS

The **topic** of a piece of nonfiction is what the text is about. A topic can usually be stated in a word or two, such as *pets* or *dog training*. The **main idea** is the most important idea that a writer wants to share about a topic. A main idea can usually be stated in a sentence, such as "The key to good dog training is consistency."

Often, the main idea of a paragraph or section of an article is directly stated in a **topic sentence**, which is usually the first or the last sentence in that paragraph or section. Sometimes, however, the main idea is **implied**, which means that it is not actually stated outright; readers must infer the main idea from supporting details. **Supporting details** are facts, examples, and other kinds of information that reinforce or elaborate upon the main idea.

As you read, be on the lookout for the main ideas of paragraphs and sections of text. Then, add up those ideas to identify the text's larger main idea or message.

### EVALUATING TEXTS

The next important step in reading informational text is evaluating it. After all, just because the text is about real people, places, and events does not mean that it is true or even well written. To evaluate a text, ask yourself the following questions.

- Is this information accurate, reliable, and trustworthy? If you're not sure, you can learn how to determine **credibility** on pages 1071–1074.
- Does the text have **unity**? In other words, do all the details in each paragraph support its main idea? Do all the paragraphs support a larger main idea?
- Is the writing **coherent**? Specifically, do the sentences connect smoothly and logically? Do text features and the text's structure make it easy to navigate?
- Does the writing have **internal consistency**? Internally consistent text has a clear **structural pattern**. It also uses transitions that make sense together, such as *first*, *later*, and *afterwards* (as opposed to *first*, *later*, and *primarily*).
- Is the writing **logical**, or can you spot logical fallacies? If you're not sure how to recognize logical fallacies, you can learn more about them on page R24.



**MODEL 1: MAIN IDEA AND DETAILS**

Read this article about a lifelike robot created by a Korean scientist.

**Female Android Debuts**

Article by **Victoria Gilman**

These school-age tots seem to be making friends with EveR-1, a female android that made her debut in South Korea. The robot was built by Baeg Moon-hong, a senior researcher with the Division for Applied Robot Technology at the Korea Institute of Industrial Technology in Ansan, just south of Seoul.

**Meet EveR-1** EveR-1 is designed to resemble a Korean female in her early 20s. Fifteen motors underneath her silicon skin allow her to express a limited range of emotions, and a 400-word vocabulary enables her to hold a simple conversation. The android weighs 110 pounds and would stand 5



Children check out Korean android EveR-1.

feet, 3 inches tall—if she could stand. EveR-1 can move her arms and hands, but her lower half is immobile.

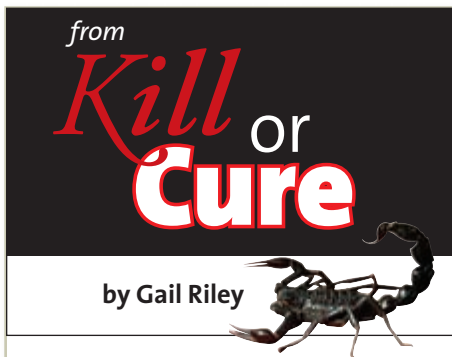
**Not Alone** Researchers at Osaka University in Japan unveiled their own life-size female android, Repliee Q1. That robot could “speak,” and gesture and even appeared to breathe but, like EveR-1, was only mobile from the waist up.

**Close Read**

1. The main idea of the “Meet EveR-1” section is **boxed**. Identify the details that support it.
2. What is the main idea of the section with the subheading “Not Alone”?
3. Is there an internal consistency to this article? Explain your answer.

**MODEL 2: MAIN IDEA AND DETAILS**

This article is about deadly poisons. Skim the title and the subheading, and answer the first **Close Read** question. Then read the article more closely to help you answer the second question.



Night falls in an Israeli desert. A cockroach skitters across the sand. Suddenly, a scorpion grabs the cockroach in its pincers. It injects searing venom into its victim through its stinger. The venom causes paralysis. The cockroach cannot move. It can do nothing to fend off the scorpion's attack.

**10 Toxic Treatments**

It's hard to believe, but the deadly venom that paralyzed the cockroach can be used to heal rather than harm. Scientists are experimenting with the Israeli scorpion's venom. Some of them believe it has the power to shrink brain tumors. For hundreds of years, scientists have been experimenting with poisons extracted from animals and plants. They have found that the same toxins that can injure or kill can also be used to treat health problems.

**Close Read**

1. Based on the title and the subheading, what do you think the main idea of the article will be?
2. Identify the main idea that the **boxed** sentences are supporting.
3. Does this article exhibit unity and coherence? Explain your answer.

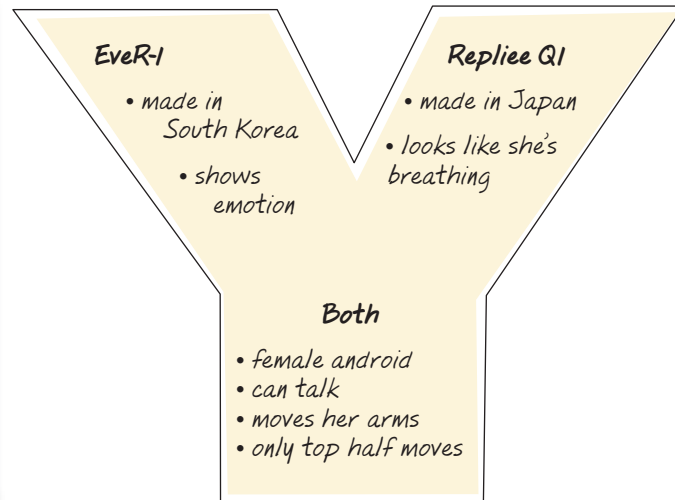
## TAKING NOTES

Have you ever read an article on a fascinating subject—life-saving poisons, for example—and later realized that you couldn't recall a single thing about it? Taking notes as you read can help you prevent that. You can use any number of formats for notes—outline, bulleted list, even a Y-chart. Just use a format that will help you quickly recognize what's most important when you glance back over your notes later. Here are two ways of recording the same information from an article you just read. Notice that the Y-chart emphasizes similarities and differences while the outline captures all the supporting details of each subject.

### OUTLINE

- I. *EveR-1 resembles a Korean female in her 20s.*
  - A. *Made in South Korea*
  - B. *Can show emotion, talk, and move her arms*
  - C. *Can only move the top half of her body*
- II. *Repliee Q1 is another life-size female android.*
  - A. *Made in Japan*
  - B. *Can talk, move her arms, and looks like she's breathing*
  - C. *Can only move the top half of her body*

### GRAPHIC ORGANIZER



## SUMMARIZING

**Summarizing** is the art of briefly retelling in your own words the main ideas and most important details of something you read, heard, or saw. It is a useful way to share your knowledge on a test, in a research report, and in a conversation.

To summarize a text, begin by taking clear and thorough notes—preferably in your own words. Then, restate the main ideas and most important details in two or three complete sentences. Keep in mind that a good summary is always shorter than the text it is summarizing. Here's an example:

*The South Korean EveR-1 and the Japanese Repliee Q1 are both life-size female androids that can talk and move their arms as well as the top half of their bodies, but only the EveR-1 shows emotions and only the Repliee Q1 looks as if she's breathing.*

## Part 3: Analyze the Text

Preview this article and answer the first **Close Read** question. Then read the article more closely, using the other questions to help you take notes. Then use your notes to summarize the article.



# THE Great Chicago Fire OF 1871

Magazine article  
by Michael Burgan

**RECIPE FOR DISASTER** Chicago in 1871 was already a big city, bustling with more than 334,000 residents. Its streets, sidewalks, and most of its buildings were made of wood. Hay and straw were inside every barn. To make the situation worse, people used candles and oil lamps.

5 Fires had been common that year because of the dry weather. The Chicago Fire Department was overworked and underequipped. On Saturday, October 7, firefighters began putting out a fire that wiped out four city blocks. It took them 16 hours. By Sunday evening the men were exhausted. Then around 8:45 P.M., a fire began in the barn of Patrick and Catherine O'Leary.

### 10 "EVERYTHING WENT WRONG"

Human error then made a bad situation worse. One firefighter later said, "From the beginning of that fatal fire, everything went wrong!" A watchman atop the courthouse saw smoke rising from the O'Leary barn, but he assumed it was coming from the previous fire. When he finally realized a new fire was blazing, he misjudged its location. His assistant sent a message to the fire stations, but he mistakenly directed horse-drawn fire wagons to a location about a mile from the burning barn. When the fire department finally reached the barn, its equipment was no match for the blaze. The new fire raged on.

### OUT OF CONTROL

As the fire blazed, there arose a deafening roar—wood crackling as flames devoured it, cries for help, explosions from oil and gas tanks, the crash of falling buildings. The fire department could do nothing to stop the fire. Around 4 A.M. the next day, the fire destroyed the city's waterworks, shutting off water to the fire hydrants. Firefighters had to drag water in buckets from Lake Michigan and the Chicago River. City officials made a desperate call for help to other cities, but their forces arrived too late. The fire kept burning—totally out of control.

### THE AFTERMATH

The Great Fire burned until October 10, when rain finally fell. Thousands of buildings had been destroyed. About 300 people had died in the blaze, and more than 100,000 were left homeless.

### Close Read

- Preview the title and subheadings. What information do you think this article will provide?
- Describe the main idea that the boxed details support. Copy the main idea and details into your notebook. Add letters as necessary.

I.

A.

B.

- The main idea of the second section is listed here. Copy it into your notebook, along with the supporting details.

II. *Human error made a bad situation even worse.*

A.

B.

- Identify the main idea and details in the third and fourth sections. Add the information to your outline.

III.

A.

B. *The fire destroyed the city's waterworks.*

IV.

A. *300 people died.*

B.