

Skimming for the Main Idea

Skim each of the following short passages and write down the main idea –

1) Gardening is a very popular hobby. Sales of plants, seeds, tools and garden magazines reach new heights every year. Some people garden for practical reasons: they like to eat vegetables from their own land. For others, the motivation is artistic and, certainly, nothing is more beautiful than a well-tended garden. Nevertheless, there is also something more. A garden is a little world. While the office, the family or the neighbourhood may be chaotic, the neat rows of plants in the garden remain orderly and disciplined. It is deeply relaxing to sit quietly in the garden when everything else seems to be out of control! And year in, year out the same cycle of seasonal gardening activities is repeated. The garden is a reassuring place. Gardeners can express their need for organization and regularity without getting into conflicts with anyone else.

Main idea: _____

2) Something basic about human nature is revealed through the appeal of the Pacific Coast. California is by far the most populous state; its large population lives mainly near the ocean. Yet the Pacific Coast of North America is one of the world's most dangerous earthquake zones. This risk has not limited people's desire to live there. Possibly those moving to California simply cannot imagine that the danger applies to them in particular. Or perhaps they trust modern building techniques to protect them. Neither belief is true, of course, but the flow of migration continues all the same. The Pacific Coast seems to be more an idea than a particular place. Its attraction is not based on physical geography as such. Rather, it stems from the dream of self-realization. Moving to this region is viewed by many as a philosophical or spiritual decision, not a practical choice. Even the most materialistic-looking migrants seem, deep down, to have a yearning soul.

Main idea: _____

3) Who has not noticed the great respect that books receive even today, in the age of computers and Web pages? Surely no one. The future, we are always told, will belong to those who have the best access to electronic information. Computerized information, especially on the Web, is so easy to update and distribute that it can surpass by far the value of anything written permanently in a dusty old book. The argument is perfectly logical. And yet, why do we not believe it more completely? Imagine two people at a cocktail party: one has just written a computer program, the other a book. There is little doubt that the author of the book will almost always arouse more interest and admiration. Yes, of course, we think the computer programmer is very intelligent, but it is the author who strikes us as wise and cultivated. Books are still the symbol of scholarship and creativity in our society. And it may be a very long time before that changes.

Main idea: _____

4) Each time the season changes, some people are pleased while others are disappointed. Spring people love the lengthening days, the flowers, and the delicate sunshine. They are not particularly impressed by the following hot days and warm nights that enchant Summer people. Fall people grow excited about the harvest, the coloured leaves, and the smell of smoke in the autumn air. And for Winter people, nothing equals the clear blue skies and bright snowfields of January. No matter how satisfied any one of these groups is when its preferred season begins, the others are always more or less impatient for the months to pass until their own favourite time of year arrives. Perhaps these predilections reflect variations in character. For example, summer-loving people are often relaxed and leisurely, in keeping with the long, hot days of that season. But on the other hand, liking one seasonal more than others may possibly just be the result of when a birthday, a holiday or some other pleasant event happens to occur. Human motivations are rarely easy to explain!

Main idea: _____