Information and Ideas

Original skill preparation; versioned source scope

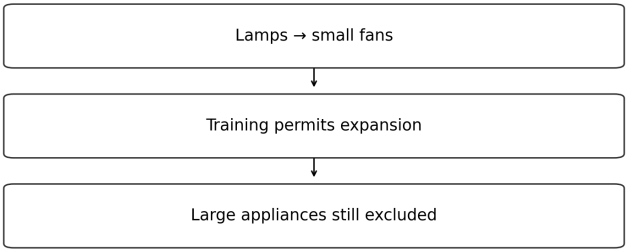
Information and Ideas on the SAT

- State the **central idea 中心思想** of a passage and tell it apart from a **detail 细节**.
- Choose the **evidence 证据**, a quotation or data, that supports a claim.
- Read tables and graphs accurately.
- Make the **inference 推断** that the text allows, and no more.

Central ideas and details

- The central idea is the point the whole passage makes, usually a relationship: a change, a contrast, a cause with limits.
- A detail supports the central idea but is not it.
- Summarise each sentence in a few words, then ask what joins them.
- Wrong answers are often too broad ("it repaired everything") or too narrow (one detail only).

Figure: Central ideas and details



- Worked steps: Lamps → small fans → Training permits expansion → Large appliances still excluded
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

Textual and quantitative evidence

- First restate the claim in your own words. Then test each option: does it make the claim more likely?
- An option can be true and interesting but not support this claim.
- For a table or graph, read the title, labels, units and groups before the numbers.
- Compare only the groups the claim names, and only within the data shown.

Inferences

- A good **inference** joins information the passage states. It adds no new cause, group or time.
- Check every word of the answer: "always", "all" or "proves" usually go further than the text.
- The right answer often sounds modest.

Worked example: a central idea

- Summaries: started with lamps; expanded after training; limits remain.
- Central idea: the café expanded its repairs, within limits.
- "It repaired everything" ignores the last sentence; "It repaired lamps" leaves out the change.

Worked example: data and scope

- Supported: at those sites and that time, the shaded street was 4 °C cooler.
- Not supported: trees cool the whole city, or shade caused the whole difference, since the streets may differ in other ways.
- The answer that keeps the place, the time and the size of the effect is the strongest.

Common errors

- Choosing a vivid detail as the central idea.
- Choosing evidence that is true but supports a different claim.
- Reading a graph's numbers before its labels and units.

Common errors (2)

- Extending a finding to new groups, places or times.
- Treating a correlation in the passage as a proven cause.

Key terms

- **central idea**: The main point that the whole passage makes.
- **detail**: A specific fact or example that supports the central idea.
- **evidence**: Information from the text or data that makes a claim more likely to be true.
- **inference**: A conclusion that follows from what the text states.

Check yourself

- A passage says a library's new index "helped readers find likely pages but did not replace reading the registers." What is its central idea?
- A claim says sales rose in 2021. A table shows 2019 and 2020 only. Can it support the claim?
- Why is "proves" a warning word in an answer choice?