Central ideas, details and the scope of a claim

Original skill preparation; versioned source scope

Central Ideas, Details and the Scope of a Claim

- State the **central idea** 中心思想 of a passage in one sentence.
- Tell a supporting **detail** 细节 apart from the main point.
- Keep the **scope** 范围 of the claim: its group, place, time and strength.
- Reject summaries that the **evidence** 证据 in the passage does not support.

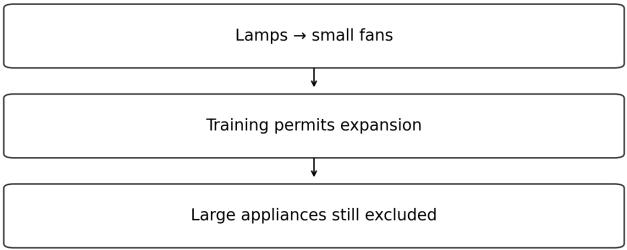
Finding the central idea

- Write a few words for each sentence, then ask what connects them.
- Many SAT passages follow a pattern: a change, a benefit with a limit, a problem with a response, a finding with a caution.
- A good central idea keeps both halves of such a pattern.

Details and their jobs

- A detail gives an example, a reason, a number or a limitation.
- Ask what job a detail does for the central idea: does it explain a benefit, or a limit?
- Two details can do different jobs; do not merge them.

Figure: Details and their jobs



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

Scope and strength

- Words like "often", "some", "may" and "in the trial" set the scope. The right answer keeps them.
- Wrong answers widen the scope ("all", "every", "replaced") or change the strength ("proves", "never").
- Wrong answers can also contradict a detail, or add a cause the passage does not give.

Practice passage

- **Passage.** The city archive began a trial in which readers could search handwritten shipping registers using an online index.
- Volunteers entered names and dates, while staff checked entries that were difficult to read.
- The index often helped researchers locate a likely page before travelling to the archive.
- It did not replace the register images: two people with the same name could still be distinguished only by reading nearby entries.

Worked example: the central idea

- Sentence summaries: a search trial; volunteers enter, staff check; often helps find a page; does not replace the images; "a route in, not a final answer"; corrections are public.
- Central idea: the index helps researchers find likely records, but the register images are still needed for some questions.
- This keeps both the benefit and the limit, and the word "often".

Worked example: rejecting summaries

- "Volunteers replaced staff." Contradicted: staff checked difficult entries.
- "The index made archive visits unnecessary." Too wide: it "often" helped, and the images are still needed.
- "The archive hid changes to the index." Contradicted: it kept a public list of corrections.
- The detail about two people with the same name explains the limit; the corrections list does a different job, showing how the index changed.

Common errors

- Choosing the most memorable detail as the central idea.
- Keeping the benefit and dropping the limit.
- Missing a scope word such as "often" or "some".

Common errors (2)

- Accepting a summary that contradicts one sentence.
- Adding a cause or result the passage does not state.

Key terms

- **central idea**: The main point of the whole passage.
- **detail**: A specific fact or example that supports the main point.
- **scope**: How far a claim reaches: which group, place, time, and how strongly.
- **evidence**: Information in the passage that supports a claim.

Check yourself

- A passage says a new bus route "cut most journey times, though not at rush hour." Give its central idea.
- Why is "The route made every journey faster" wrong?
- What job does the phrase "though not at rush hour" do?