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[IDENTIFYING MAIN POINT IN RC]

In this article, we will discuss a technique called Paragraph Summary to deduce and select the main point of a Reading Comprehension Passage

MAIN POINT OF RC PASSAGE

According to OG – *each RC passage is a unified whole – that is, the individual sentences and paragraphs support and develop one main idea or central point* which the student must identify. In this article, we will discuss a technique called Paragraph Summaries to arrive at the main point of RC passage. First let's see some characteristics of the main point:

1. It is a single line statement that expresses the intent of the entire passage
2. It is broad: scope spans the entire passage and is not limited to an example or paragraph in the passage.
3. It is precise: It most likely will not contain any specific detail that is outlined in the passage

Keep the above in mind. We will use these as we evaluate the correct and incorrect answer choices in our example.

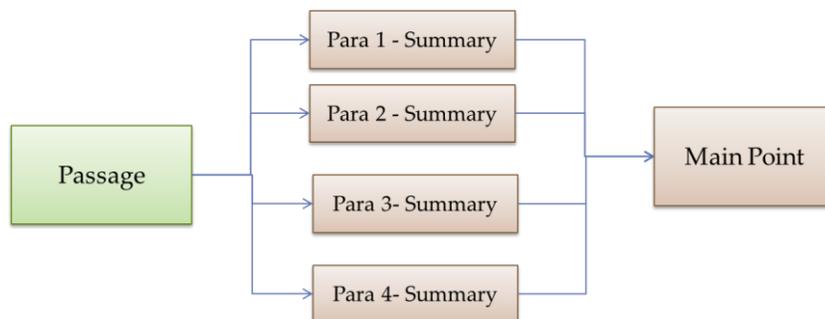
Definitions

Here are some definitions that we will follow in this article to make reading simple and enjoyable:

1. Passage: The entire RC passage for which have to identify the main point.
2. Paragraph: For passages with multiple paragraphs, a paragraph is defined as a group of lines that are isolated by delimiters. For long passages without spatial delimiters (essentially passages with one paragraph) – a group of 3-4 lines that express a unique idea.

Paragraph Summaries and Main Point

So what is paragraph summary and how does it relate to the main point of the passage. A paragraph summary is a single line statement that summarizes the paragraph. Assuming that a passage has multiple paragraphs, the main point of your passage is basically a summary of paragraph summaries. Let's consider a simple example in which the paragraph summaries have already been synthesized and devise the passage's main point.



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Applying it to GMATPrep Problem

The identification of femininity with morality and a belief in the innate moral superiority of women were fundamental to the cult of female domesticity in the nineteenth-century United States. Ironically, this ideology of female benevolence empowered women in the realm of social activism, enabling them to escape the confines of their traditional domestic spheres and to enter prisons, hospitals, battlefields, and slums. By following this path, some women came to wield considerable authority in the distribution of resources and services in their communities.

The sentimentalized concept of female benevolence bore little resemblance to women's actual work, which was decidedly unsentimental and businesslike, in that it involved chartering societies, raising money, and paying salaries. Moreover, in the face of legal limitations on their right to control money and property, women had to find ingenious legal ways to run and finance organized philanthropy. In contrast to the day-to-day reality of this work, the idealized image of female benevolence lent a sentimental and gracious aura of altruism to the very real authority and privilege that some women commanded—which explains why some women activists clung tenaciously to this ideology. But clinging to this ideology also prevented these women from even attempting to gain true political power because it implied a moral purity that precluded participation in the messy world of partisan politics.

Which of the following best summarizes the main point of the passage?

- A. The ideology of female benevolence emancipated women from the treacheries of a life stricken with grief and poverty.
- B. The belief in women's innate moral superiority allowed women to exercise political power without participating in partisan politics.
- C. The cult of female domesticity helped some women to gain power and privilege but kept most women confined to the domestic sphere.
- D. The ideology of female benevolence empowered women in the realm of social activism but placed limits on their direct political power.
- E. The idealization of female altruism enabled women to engage in philanthropic activities but prevented them from managing money and property.

Hopefully you would have reviewed the passage and the Main Point question. Here is how I would approach the problem.

Paragraph	My Paragraph summary
<p>The identification of femininity with morality and a belief in the innate moral superiority of women were fundamental to the cult of female domesticity in the nineteenth-century United States. Ironically, this ideology of female benevolence empowered women in the realm of social activism, enabling them to escape the confines of their traditional domestic spheres and to enter prisons, hospitals, battlefields, and slums. By following this path, some women came to wield considerable authority in the distribution of resources and services in their communities</p>	<p>Ideology of Female benevolence (FB) gave considerable power to some women.</p>
<p>The sentimentalized concept of female benevolence bore little resemblance to women's actual work, which was decidedly unsentimental and businesslike, in that it involved chartering societies, raising money, and paying salaries. Moreover, in the face of legal limitations on their right to control money and property, women had to find ingenious legal ways to run and finance organized philanthropy. In contrast to the day-to-day reality of this work, the idealized image of female benevolence lent a sentimental and gracious aura of altruism to the very real authority and privilege that some women commanded—which explains why some women activists clung tenaciously to this ideology. But clinging to this ideology also prevented these women from even attempting to gain true political power because it implied a moral purity that precluded participation in the messy world of partisan politics.</p>	<p>Benefit: Even though these powerful women went about their business normally, the idealized image of FB made it look good (unselfish). Downside: FB also limited women from gaining true political power.</p>

Below is the main point that I came up with by combining individual passage summaries.

Pre-think: *FB ideology gave some women considerable power, helped them look noble while they did their jobs but limited the power that women could directly have.*

Let's now evaluate the answer choices and see how we can use the 'Prethinking' to come up with the answer.

Choice	Explanation
A. The ideology of female benevolence emancipated women from the treacheries of a life stricken with grief and poverty.	Incorrect: Emancipation of women from poverty is not talked about in this passage. This choice is out of scope.
B. The belief in women's innate moral superiority allowed women to exercise political power without participating in partisan politics.	Incorrect: This is opposite to the information present in second paragraph.
C. The cult of female domesticity helped some women to gain power and privilege but kept most women confined to the domestic sphere.	Incorrect: Only talks about information in first paragraph (limited scope). Even then paragraph 1 does not say that only some women were taken out of the confines of homes. It says that only some women wielded considerable authority.
D. The ideology of female benevolence empowered women in the realm of social activism but placed limits on their direct political power.	Correct: Very similar to the Prethinking Main Point that we came up with. Covers both the first and the second paragraph.
E. The idealization of female altruism enabled women to engage in philanthropic activities but <u>prevented them from managing money and property</u> .	Incorrect: The underlined portion is <u>inconsistent</u> with the information in the passage. Moreover, it does not talk about the political power as covered in paragraph 2.

Characteristics of incorrect Answer Choices

Now that we have solved the example above, let's review some of the characteristics of incorrect answer choices. There are 4 kind of incorrect answer choices in Main Point questions.

- 1) **Out of Scope (OSC):** These answer choices go beyond the scope of the passage and lists things that may be related to the subject of the passage but are not discussed in the passage. For example, choice A above is out of scope because it talks about emancipation of women from grief and poverty – a topic not discussed in the passage. OSC answer choice aims to try to exploit your common knowledge about the topic to force you to choose it as the correct answer. OSC choices may seem an attractive option if you have not read the passage well or understood it completely. However, OSC answer choices are relatively easy to discard if you have understood the passage well.
- 2) **Partially scope:** This answer choice will list some things that are relevant and mentioned in the passage. However, the scope of this answer choice will not cover the entire passage or author's intent for that matter and will be limited to one or more, but not all, paragraphs. An example of the same is choice C – which only talks about information presented in paragraph 1. Note this choice may seem extremely attractive since it may present information that is factually consistent with the passage. But remember – Main Point needs to encompass the scope of **entire passage**.

- 3) **Opposite:** This answer choice states the main purpose but in reverse order. For example, if the purpose of the passage were to outline the benefits of cooking then the opposite answer choice would state the purpose as the downside/drawbacks of cooking. Choice B in the example above falls in this category.
- 4) **Inconsistent:** Test makers will sometimes create an answer choice that will embody the purpose of the passage but will add a modifier to that purpose that makes the entire answer choice inconsistent with the passage. Choice E above comes close to this.

CORE SKILLS THAT YOU NEED TO MASTER

You are bound to encounter up to 4 main point questions in your exam. The core skills required to answer these questions are listed below.

1. **Ability to Summarize:** The ability to summarize paragraphs in a few words. The summary must be short and accurate.
2. **Prethinking:** The ability to combine paragraph summaries and come up with passage summary.
3. **Terminology/Vocabulary:** not a very big factor, but you need to have a basic understanding of most terms used in the language summary to select the correct language. For example, you need to know what evaluate means and how is it different from advocate.
4. **Evaluate:** Even when you do the above 3 correctly, the main point that you come up with during your Prethinking may not be the main point of the passage. Hence, you need the ability to evaluate the answer choices and select the one that is closest to the one that you came up with during Prethinking. Also, to be absolutely certain, you need to reject the remaining 4 for good reasons.

HOW TO ACE ANSWERING MAIN POINT QUESTIONS

Whenever you answer a main point question incorrectly, ask yourself – which core skill did I falter on? As you solve more and more questions, you may find that you make mistakes because you are not as strong in one or more core skills. This would help you isolate the problem and devise a plan to work on it. For example, if you find out that you are able to Prethink the main point correctly but still you make a mistake, then you can be certain that you either lack the ability to evaluate the answer choices or are not as conversant with the terminology. Then you can focus only on strengthening these skills to improve your accuracy.

HOW TO ARRIVE AT PARAGRAPH SUMMARY

Paragraph	Reading and thinking (in mind)	My Paragraph summary (written)
The identification of femininity with morality and a belief in the innate moral superiority of women were fundamental to the cult of female domesticity in the nineteenth-century United States.	There was belief in moral superiority of women. This belief was imp.	Ideology of Female benevolence (FB) gave considerable power to some women.
Ironically, this ideology of female benevolence empowered women in the realm of social activism, enabling them to escape the confines of their traditional domestic spheres and to enter prisons, hospitals, battlefields, and slums.	This belief gave women power, enabled them to get out of houses.	
By following this path, some women came to wield considerable authority in the distribution of resources and services in their communities	Furthermore, some women got considerable power.	
The sentimentalized concept of female benevolence bore little resemblance to women's actual work, which was decidedly unsentimental and businesslike, in that it involved chartering societies, raising money, and paying salaries.	Women were professional, in the work they did. Not kind hearted as believed.	Benefit: Even though these powerful women went about their business normally, the idealized image of FB made it look good (unselfish). Downside: FB also limited women from gaining true political power.
Moreover, in the face of legal limitations on their right to control money and property, women had to find ingenious legal ways to run and finance organized philanthropy.	Ok there were some limitations on women's right to control money. Women found ways around it.	
In contrast to the day-to-day reality of this work, the idealized image of female benevolence lent a sentimental and gracious aura of altruism to the very real authority and privilege that some women commanded—which explains why some women activists clung tenaciously to this ideology.	Women benefitted from image of FB, so some women clung to it.	
But clinging to this ideology also prevented these women from even attempting to gain true political power because it implied a moral purity that precluded participation in the messy world of partisan politics.	However, it limited their power. No political power.	