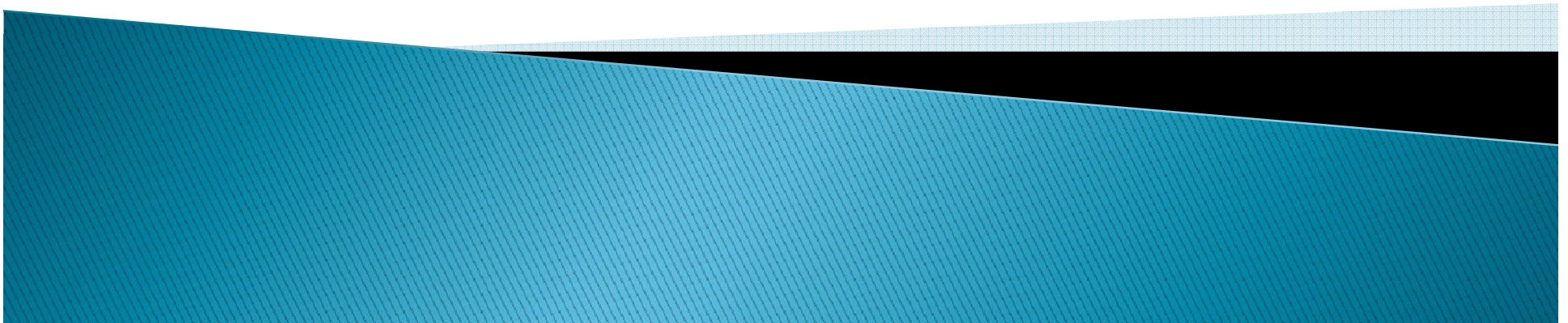# Strategies to Improve Students' Reading Comprehension in Any Discipline

Oct. 28, 2009
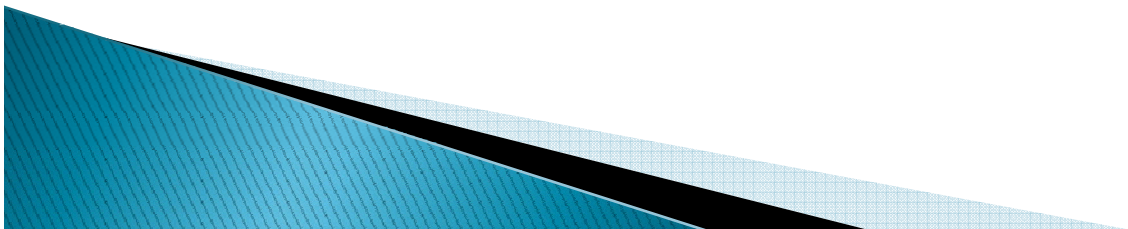
CETaL

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Presenters/Design Team

‣ Nancy Shaffer: Developmental Reading and Writing

‣ Terri Storey-Gore: Developmental Reading and Writing

‣ Steven Varela: First-Year Composition

Overview of Modules

- Purposes for reading and reading process
- Metacognition
- Previewing
- Main and supporting ideas
- Annotating and note taking

- Outlining and mapping
- Vocabulary
- Memory
- Study groups
- Reading Rhetorically
- Electronic texts
- Visuals
- Textbooks

Texas Higher Education
Coordinating Board

- Current research at all levels of schooling emphasizes the importance of effective reading comprehension, as well as the challenges instructors face teaching it.

- At the university, though, we assume that this is an ability that has already been acquired by our students, or that perhaps it's not our responsibility to have to teach it.
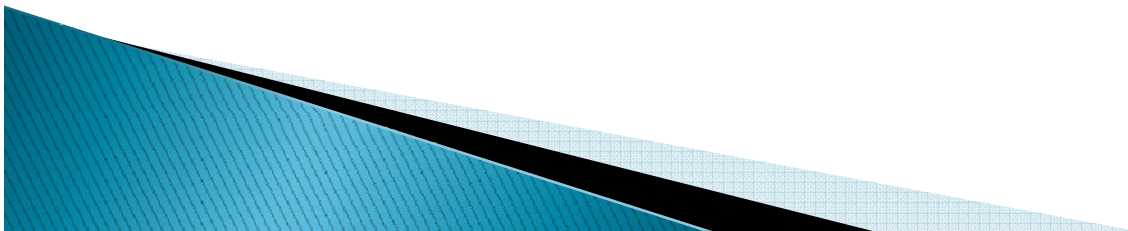
Question #1

- How prepared are your students to read in your classes? How do you know?
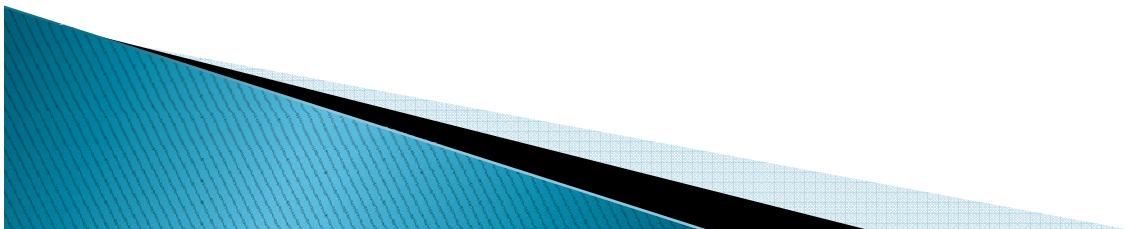
The Reality!

- Student readiness for college-level reading has steadily declined since 1999 to its lowest point in twelve years, and six million of the nation's secondary school students are reading well below grade level.

- Although studies have shown the need to continue developing reading skills and strategies long after students are "able to read," 28 states mandate teaching reading comprehension skills through the eighth grade only— as though reading skills are fully developed by the age of 13.
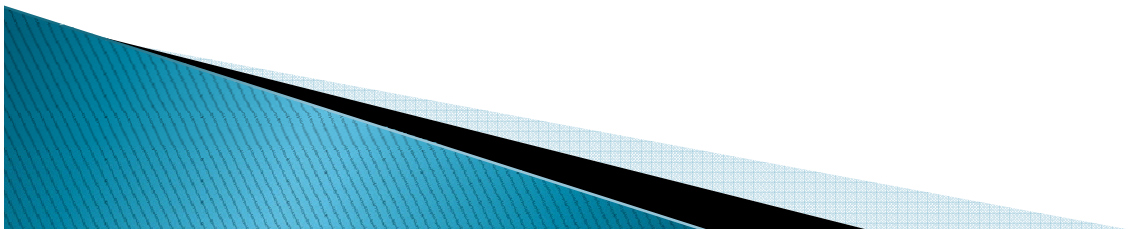
- Almost 60% of all schools do not have grade specific standards for reading comprehension. Therefore, teachers are at a loss in determining who is reading well enough and who is reading poorly.

- Because their state does not require it, few teachers at the high school level teach reading strategies.
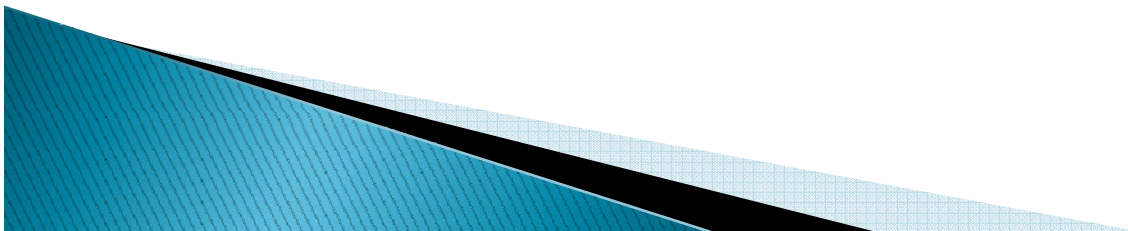
- College-level reading preparedness is seldom addressed in high school, particularly for students who are not identified by their teachers as college bound. High school English teachers assume students "know how to read" when they come to class.

- To a great degree—college professors have the same assumptions and *higher* expectations!
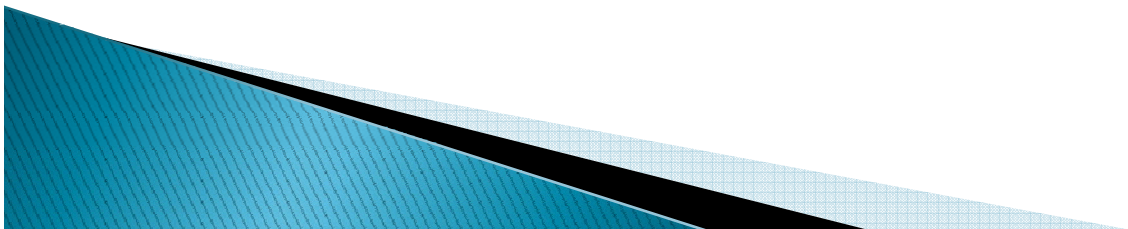
Sound Familiar?

- "This is boring."

- "That was confusing… I didn't get it."

- "Stupid book."

- "Why don't they just tell us what we need to read for the test!"
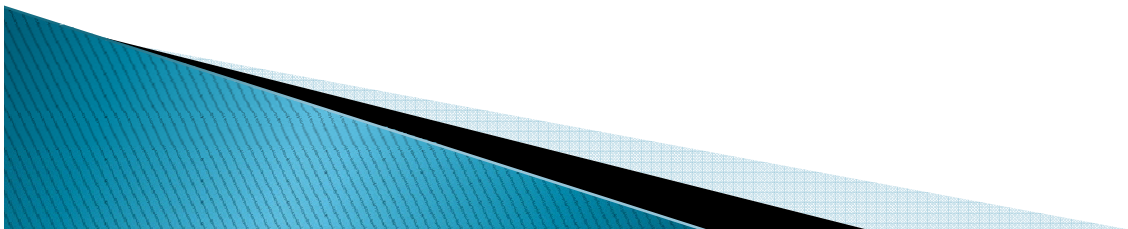
And, perhaps, this is what we say…

- "They didn't even open their books."

- "Are they even trying?!?"

- "How are they ever going to learn, if they don't read?"

- "It's not my job to teach them how to read!"
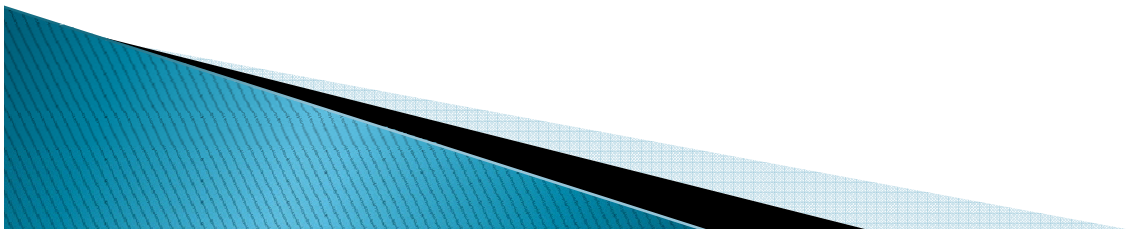
Question #2

- What are some things you **do** to help students comprehend the readings in your classes? And, how do you know if they are working?

- OR

- What do you **think** you could do to help students with reading comprehension in your classes? And, how would you determine if they are working?
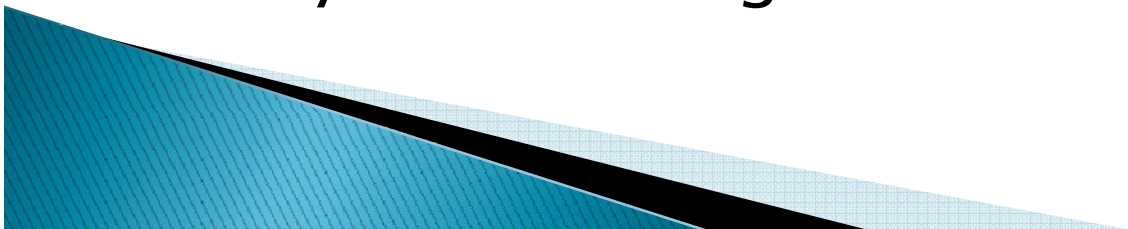
‣ We cannot change how well prepared our students are when they come to us, but we can (teach) effective reading strategies in our courses regardless of the subject matter. Poor reading is a problem many of our students face, so it is our problem, too.
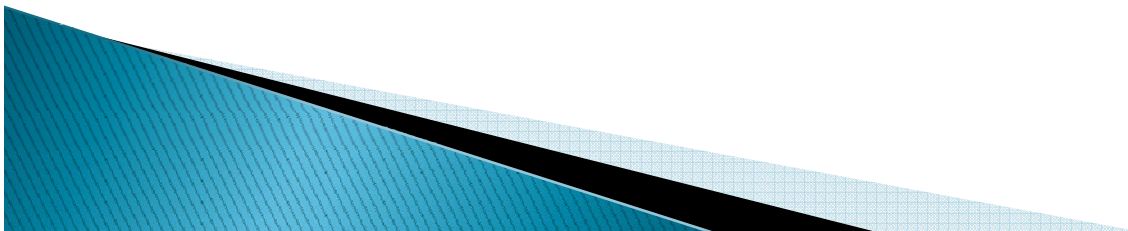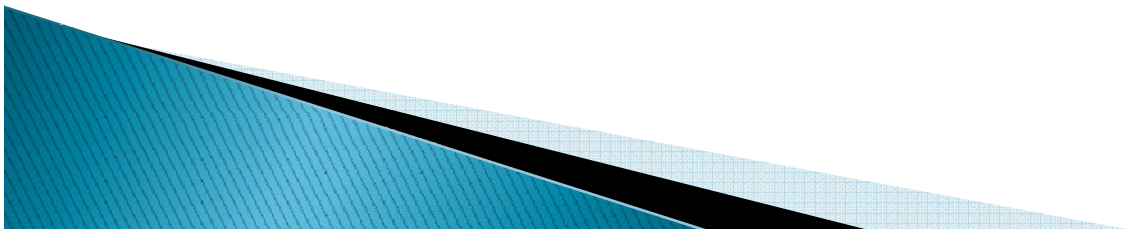
Strategies to Teach Effective Reading Skills
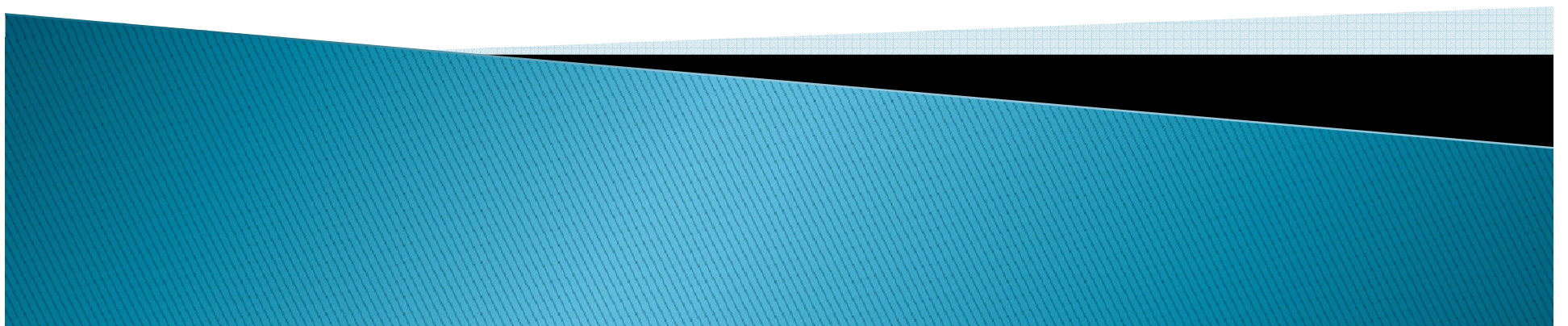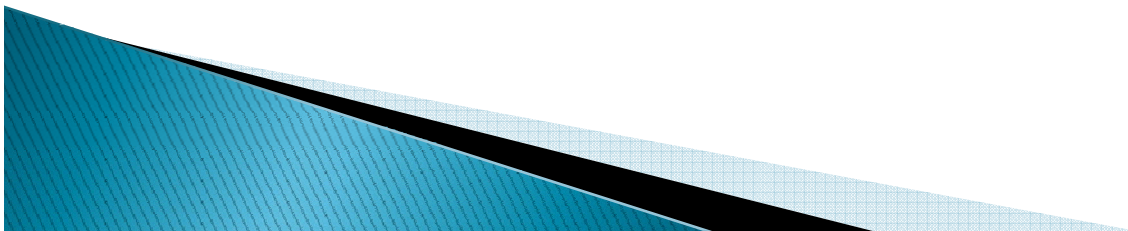
Reading Strategies

- Strategy #1: Pre-Reading for Focus

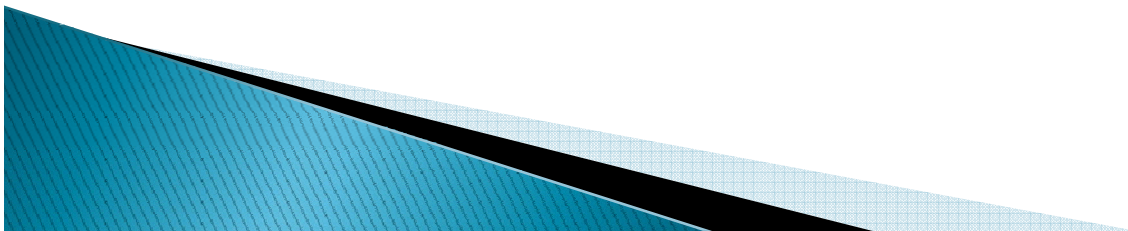- Strategy #2: Distinguishing Main and Supporting Ideas

Pre-Reading Strategies

Pre-Reading Strategies

- How do we get our mind working with those words on the page?

Get Focused – Have a Purpose!

- Look at the

BOLD-FACED HEADINGS

What do they tell us about the PURPOSE of this reading?
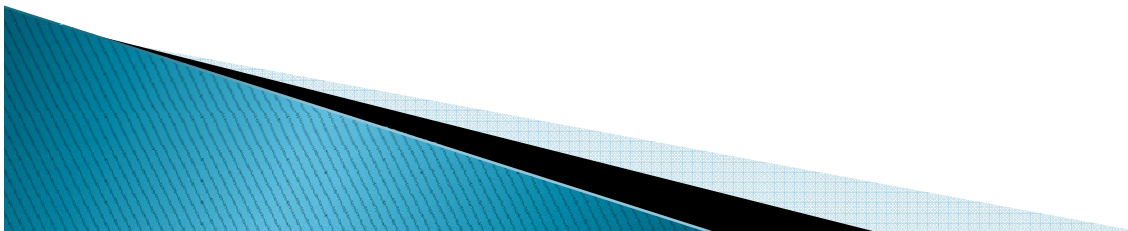
LOOK AT:

▸ SIZES / COLORS

▸ Identify their functions:

Title

Main Ideas

Supporting Ideas

USE HEADINGS to FORM QUESTIONS

- WHY?

  HOW?

  WHAT?

  WHEN?

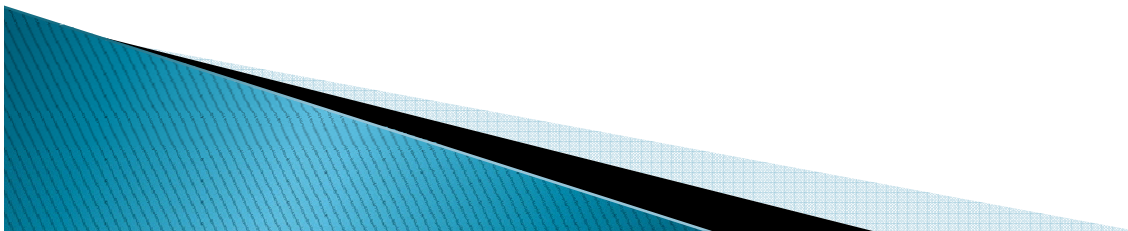 WHO?

  WHERE?

READ FOR ANSWERS
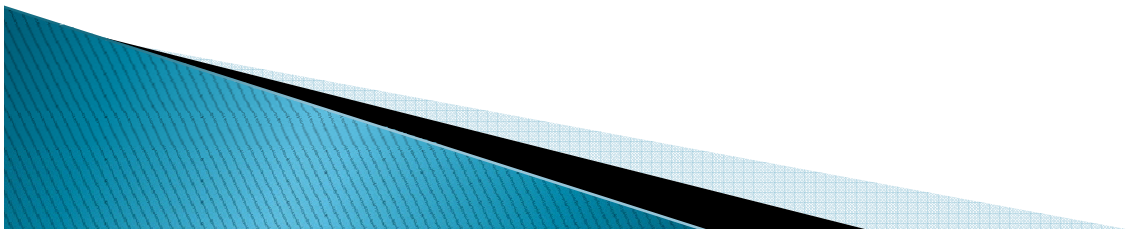
- TAKE NOTES
  - WRITE SUMMARIES
    - for each section
  - OUTLINE
  - DO CONCEPT MAPS

CONCEPT MAPS

CHAPTER TITLE: "FROM NEW ERA TO GREAT DEPRESSION 1920-1932"

E. The Lost Generation

D. Mass Culture

I. The Roaring Twenties

C. The New Negro

A. Prohibition

1.   2.

B. The New Woman

1.   2.

1.   2.   3.
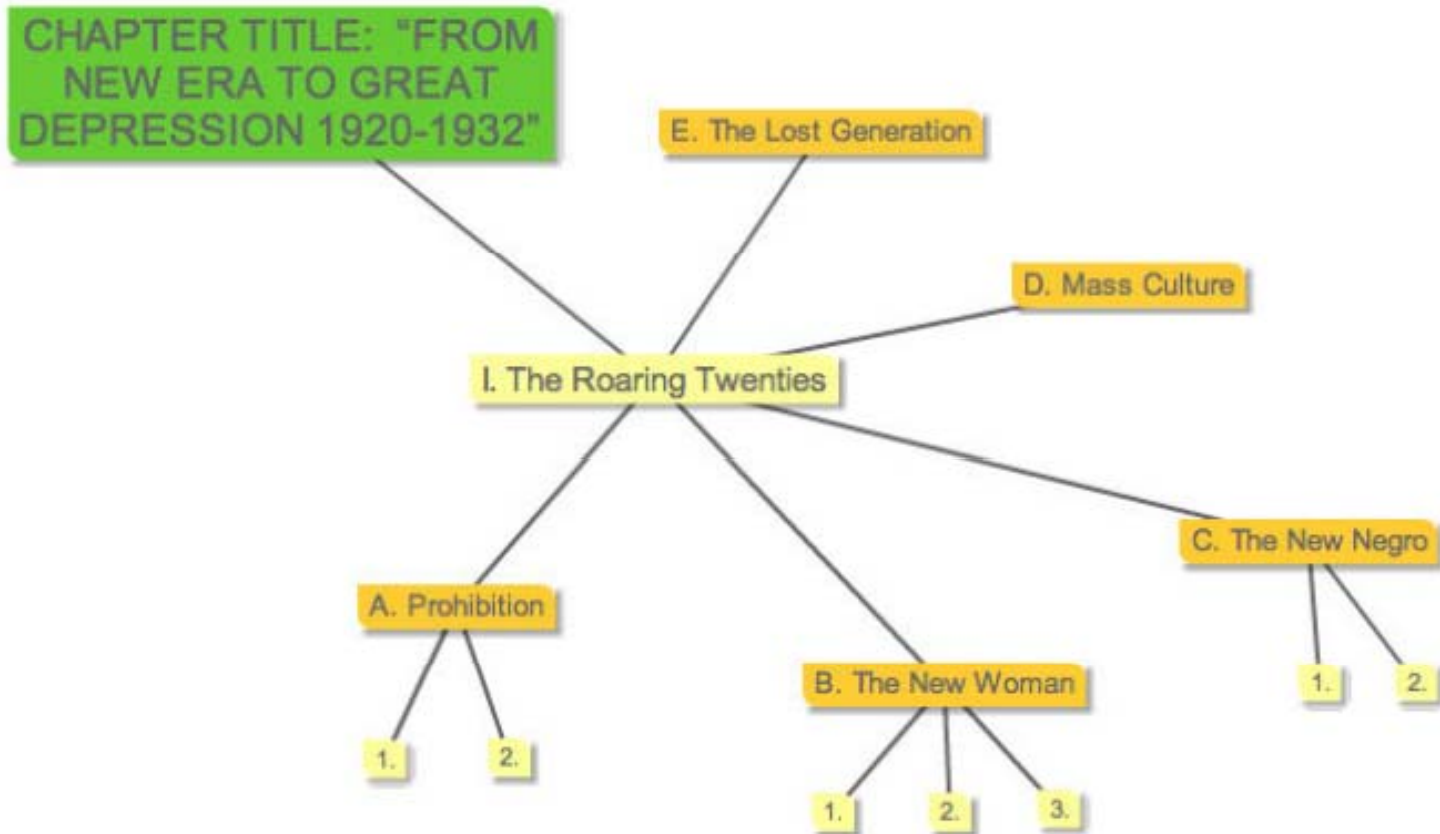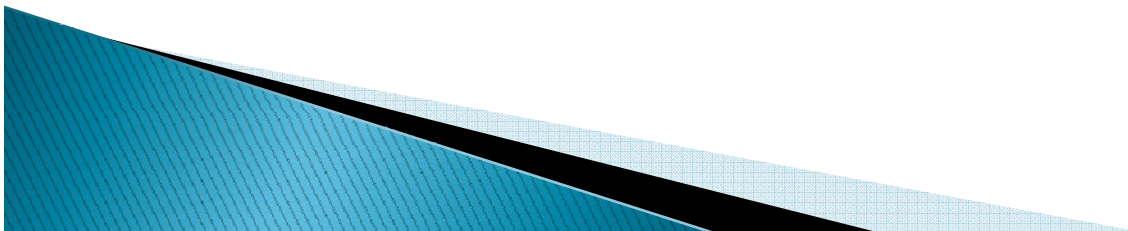
Distinguishing Main and Supporting Ideas

Distinguishing Main and Supporting ideas

Students often say:

▸ "How do they expect us to remember everything from the reading when they assign over 30 pages to read?!?"

▸ "This is just too much."

▸ "I bet they haven't read all of this themselves--and they expect us to understand it all!"
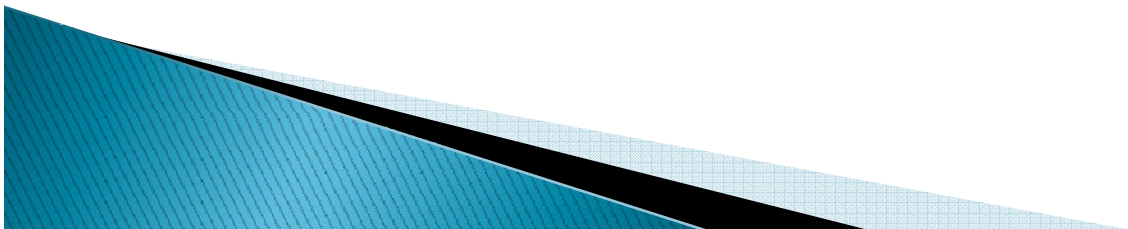
Sound familiar?

- One reason for this is because they have a hard time distinguishing main ideas from supporting details
- In other words, sometimes students "can't see the forest for the trees" with the trees representing the supporting details that should make the forest, or the main idea, clear.
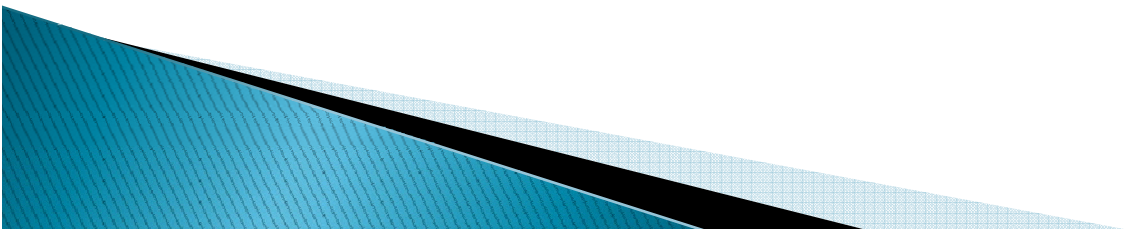
Fortunately:

- Most college-level readings are structured to help students distinguish between main ideas and supporting details.
- Textbook chapters and sections within the chapter, as well as other types of readings we assign, all have one or more main idea or key concept.
- Authors then use explanations and supporting ideas--including evidence and examples--to clarify and support.
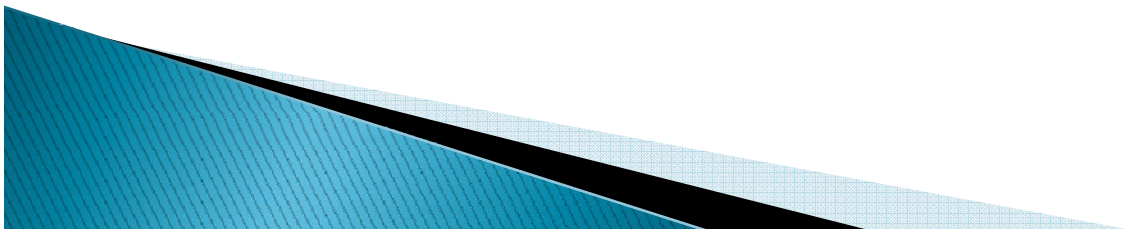
How we can help:

- Showing students how to identify both stated and implied main ideas as well as how to understand the roles of supporting details can help them become more effective readers.
- Being able to distinguish between main ideas and supporting details helps students draw conclusions, evaluate, and critically interpret all integral skills for comprehension in college reading.

Strategy #1--Asking questions that help identify main ideas and supporting details

- These are basic questions you can ask both to stimulate interest in a reading and to create a framework for recognizing the main idea and supporting details:
- Based on the title of the reading, what do you think the article will be about?
- Is there one sentence that describes the main idea for this topic?
- What two words would you use to describe the "gist" of the paragraph?
- What details from the selection support this "gist"?
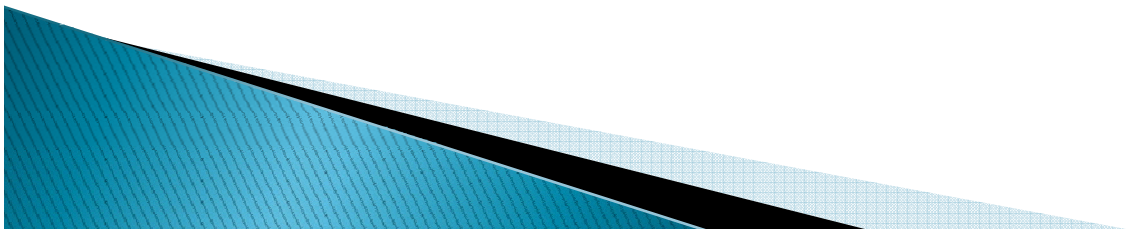
Strategy #2--Identifying presentation patterns in a textbook

- The headings in the textbook should serve as a guide to the overall pattern.
- They may vary in size, color, font type, or style (italicized, underlined, bolded, all capital letters).
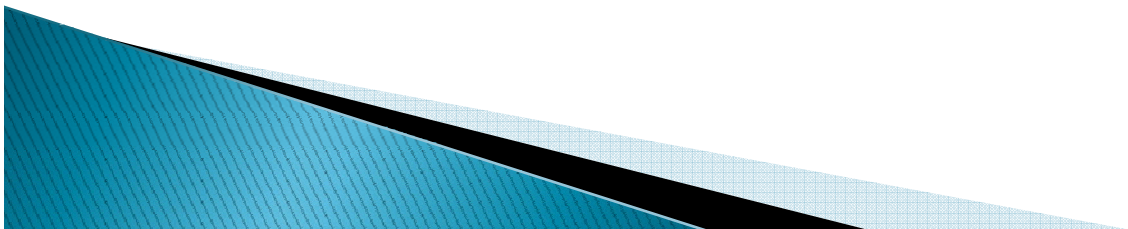- Then, the paragraphs within those sections might also follow a consistent pattern.
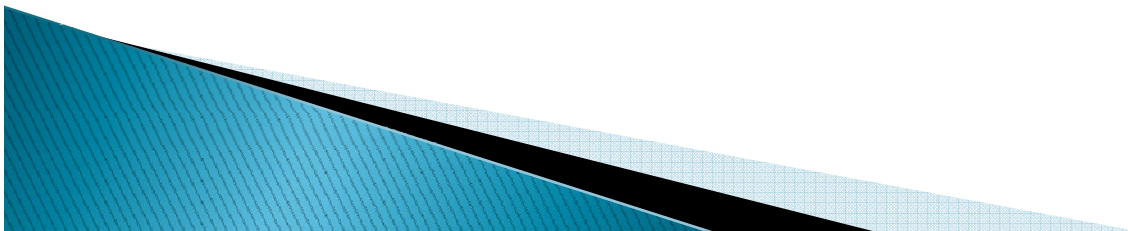
Strategy #3--Common Patterns

- BOLD HEADING--ALL CAPS

Introduction to the concepts of this section or chapter.

  ◦ Bold Heading

  The first concept will be considered in detail.
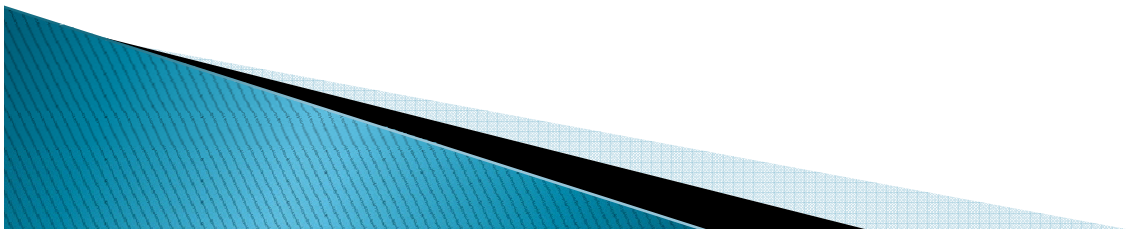
Common Patterns in Paragraphs

▸ Pattern A: First sentence: Main idea

▸ Next sentence(s): Further explanation of the main idea.

▸ Next sentence(s): Examples or evidence or both.

▸ Final sentence of the paragraph: May contain a summary idea of the main concepts of the paragraph, or a lead-in to the continued development of the main idea in the following paragraph.
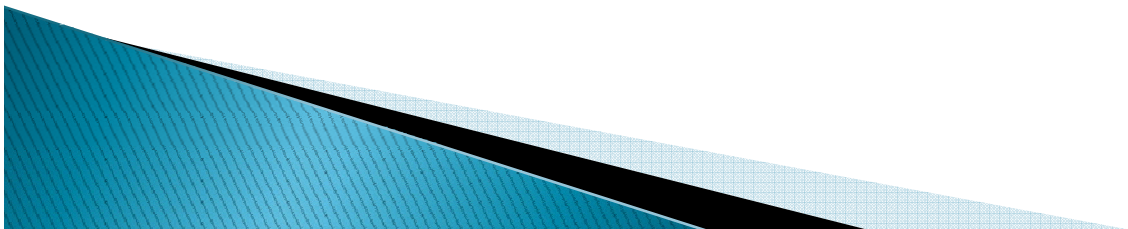
Common Patterns in Paragraphs

- Pattern B: Paragraph starts with examples/evidence and concludes with a main idea statement.
- Pattern C: Paragraph consists of examples and evidence as a follow-up to the preceding paragraph's main idea statement.
- Pattern D: Paragraph provides explanations, examples, evidence, comparisons and contrasts, but the main idea is implied; it is not stated clearly in any one sentence of the paragraph. This means you need to determine the main idea and write it in the margin in your own words.

Common Patterns in Paragraphs

- Teaching students to read these patterns will help them to identify the main idea and supporting details.
- One simple strategy for this is to ask students to highlight, underline, circle, or otherwise mark the main idea, explanations, examples, and evidence.
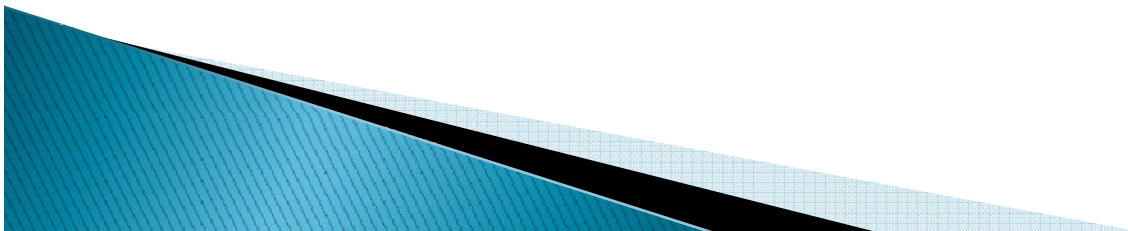
Strategy #4—Identifying supporting details first

▸ When students struggle to locate the main idea of a paragraph, they can use this process of elimination strategy. By identifying the supporting details first, they can narrow down the paragraph's contents to arrive at the main idea.

▸ Identify the following--The three Es.

  ◦ Examples

  ◦ Evidence

  ◦ Explanations

  HINT: Remind students to look for key words that signal examples, evidence, and other supporting details in your specific textbook. Strengthening their awareness of signal words such as "for example, as, like, imagine" may make a significant difference.

▸ If there is a sentence left, could it be the main idea? If so, it could be the main idea.
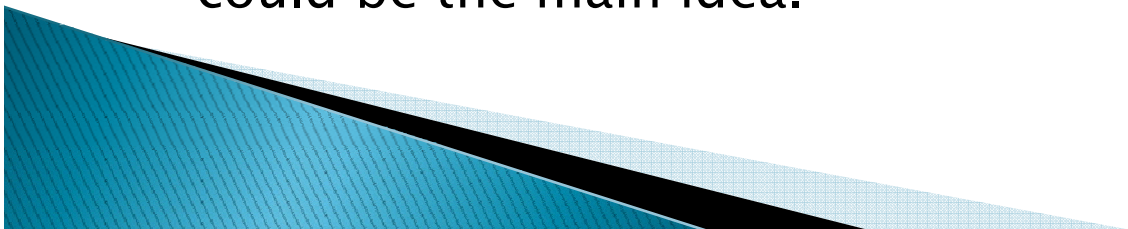
Strategy #4-A-- Highlighting to emphasize structure

▸ If highlighting is taught, but not structured, students often over-highlight, placing equal emphasis on many subordinate ideas and often missing the main point.

▸ One solution is to Color Code annotation, using different colors for different kinds of ideas:

BLUE- Examples

GREEN- Explanations

PINK-Evidence

RED- Main Ideas

This allows students to identify what kind of information is available quickly and to locate and study main ideas easily.

Strategy #4-B- Strategic underlining

▸ Students will also experience the same problems with highlighting-if there is a focused strategy for pencil marking as well, students can differentiate between the levels of ideas more clearly.

▸ BOX (around the sentence)=main idea

▸ SOLID UNDERLINE=explanation

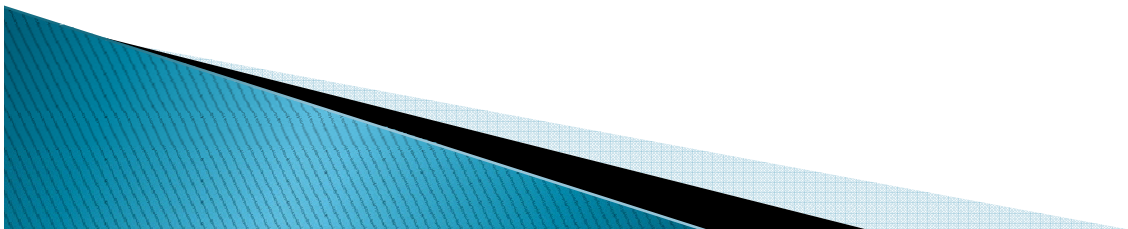▸ DASHED UNDERLINE=examples

▸ CIRCLE (around the sentence)= evidence
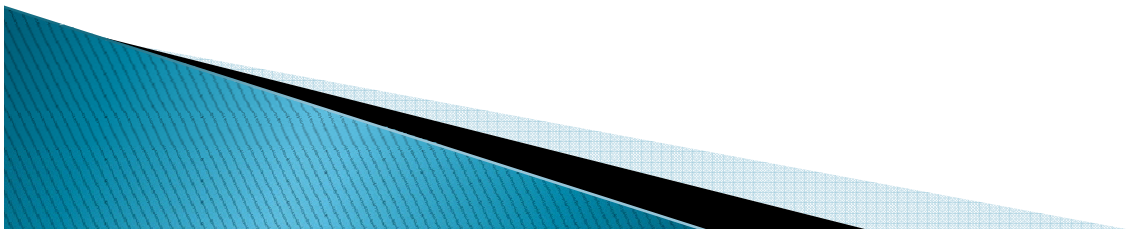
Hungry for More?

- Although there are many other strategies, demonstrations, and sample exercises in the Modules themselves, these are some of the quickest and easiest ones to implement right away.

- Once the modules are in the THECB repository, any educator can get a full look at what these modules have to offer and can modify these concepts to fit their specific discipline.
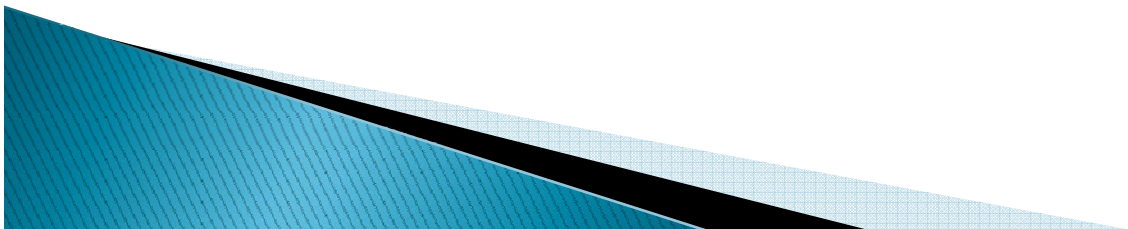
Conclusion

- Learners need to develop strategies that help them take control of their learning.

- The purpose of our project is to create 14 digitized instructional modules designed to provide college-level faculty with effective strategies to improve reading comprehension skills in entry-level college courses across disciplines.

Thank you!!!!