



Sometimes, the main idea is in the last sentence of a paragraph.

Examples:

Why are grasshoppers green and polar bears white? The green colouring of grasshoppers makes them hard to see among the green leaves, while the white coat of the polar bear matches the colour of ice and snow. Many forest animals have spots or stripes, which help them blend in with their surroundings. This is nature's way of protecting animals against their enemies.

Many people think it is unlucky to walk under a ladder, break a mirror or open an umbrella inside a house. Friday the 13th is considered an unlucky day. On the other hand, a horseshoe, a rabbit's foot or a four-leaf clover are all signs of good luck. People who believe these things are said to be superstitious.

Main ideas help you to focus on the important parts, to summarise and to remember information.

REPORTS

Reports give factual information about a broad range of natural and man-made phenomena.

Reports give factual information about a range of subjects.

All **reports** have the same basic structure and language features.

STRUCTURE

General statement

This places the subject of the report into a category.

- A kangaroo is an Australian animal.
- The Nile is the longest river in the world.
- The didgeridoo is a wind instrument developed by the Indigenous people of northern Australia.

Listing (describing)

A series of paragraphs follow that describe different aspects of the topic.

FEATURES

- written in present tense
- written in third person
- doing and being verbs
- technical vocabulary
- may contain headings and subheadings
- pictures, photos, tables and diagrams support the facts

STRATEGIES

Analysing
Finding main ideas
Making connections
Relating ideas



Think of a report as a big list of facts written in a logical order. Note how the writer connects ideas by **cause and effect**, and by **comparing and contrasting**. The ideas in science reports will often be organised through **problems and solutions**.

(See Top-level structure pp. 23–26)

As you read, you are constantly gathering new knowledge and **making connections** with what you already know. Keep your purpose in mind. Make **predictions**. Read the words and study the visuals — they work together to make meaning. Remember that the author is presenting a particular point of view.

HOW DOES A REPORT 'WORK'?

We can analyse a text to see how it is structured and how the author has connected the pieces of information together.

Example:

Icebergs

General statement

Icebergs are large, floating masses of ice. They form when a glacier reaches the sea and huge chunks of ice break off and float away. Large icebergs can be as tall as a fifty-storey building and several kilometres wide. Icebergs gradually melt as they float into warmer waters.

Comparing

Cause and effect

Cause and effect

Cause and effect

Problem

Cause and effect

Solution

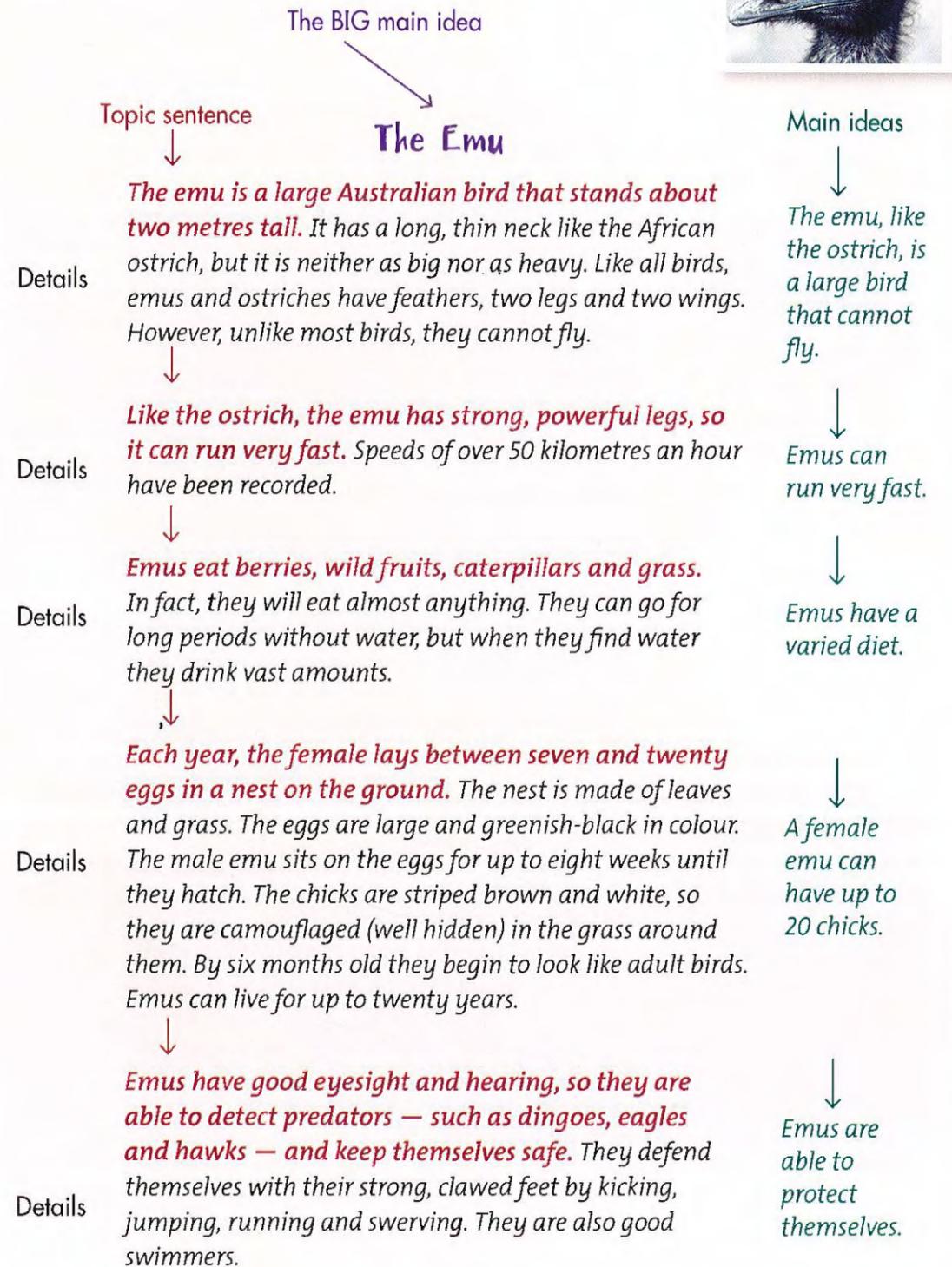
The Titanic, the largest and most modern passenger ship of its time, hit an iceberg in the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean around midnight on 15 April 1912. It was one of the worst shipwrecks in history, with over 1500 lives lost. This disaster led to the establishment of an International Ice Patrol to report on icebergs in the Atlantic shipping lanes.

glacier: a slow-moving river of ice



Listing

Example:



VOCABULARY

Information reports contain **technical vocabulary** — specific words that relate to the topic. Sometimes, the writer will show the more difficult words in bold type and give you their meanings at the end of the text in a **glossary** or word bank. Sometimes the writer will suggest the meaning of a word by using brackets or dashes.

Examples:

- *The chicks are striped brown and white, so they are camouflaged (well hidden) in the grass around them.*
- *Emus have good eyesight and hearing so they are able to detect predators — such as dingoes, eagles and hawks — and keep themselves safe.*

Use a dictionary to find the meanings of any words you don't know.

HOW DO THE IDEAS RELATE TO EACH OTHER?

Reports contain ideas that relate to each other in certain ways — particularly **cause and effect**, **comparing and contrasting**, and in simple **lists** joined by commas. Look for the words that signal these relationships.

(See Top-level structures pp. 23–26, Transition (connecting) words pp. 30–31 and Conjunctions p. 31)



Like the ostrich, the emu is a large and flightless bird.

Example:

The Emu

The emu is a large Australian bird that stands about two metres tall. It has a long, thin neck like the African ostrich [COMPARING], but it is neither as big nor as heavy. [CONTRASTING] Like all birds, emus and ostriches have feathers, two legs and two wings. [COMPARING] However, unlike most birds, they cannot fly. [CONTRASTING]

Like the ostrich, [COMPARING] the emu has strong, powerful legs, [CAUSE] so it can run very fast. [EFFECT] Speeds of over 50 kilometres an hour have been recorded.

Emus eat berries, wild fruits, caterpillars and grass. [LIST] In fact, they will eat almost anything. They can go for long periods without water, but when they find water [CAUSE] they drink vast amounts. [EFFECT]

Each year, the female lays between seven and twenty eggs in a nest on the ground. The nest is made of leaves and grass. The eggs are large and greenish-black in colour. The male emu sits on the eggs [CAUSE] for up to eight weeks until they hatch. [EFFECT] The chicks are striped brown and white [CAUSE], so they are camouflaged (well hidden) [EFFECT] in the grass around them. By six months old they begin to look like adult birds. [COMPARING] Emus can live for up to twenty years.

Emus have good eyesight and hearing, [CAUSE] so they are able to detect predators [EFFECT] — such as dingoes, eagles and hawks — and keep themselves safe. They defend themselves with their strong, clawed feet, [LIST] by kicking, jumping, running and swerving. [LIST] They are also good swimmers.

As we read a report and study the visuals, we make meaning at three levels: **literal**, **inferential** and **personal**.

Check your understanding

Literal

- * How is an emu similar or different to an ostrich?
- * How does an emu defend itself?

Right there on the page

Inferential

- * Why don't emus nest in trees?
- * Why does the male emu sit on the eggs?

Reading between the lines

Personal

- * Why might emus be a problem to farmers?
- * Why do you think the emu is a protected bird?

Thinking about things



The ostrich is a native bird of Africa.