Find the Main Ideas in Reading

As you skim your textbook, look for the following clues that will help you identify the main idea(s) in your reading assignment:

1. **Titles, Headings, and Sub-Headings.** By placement, size and visual prompts (any kind of decorative item which draws your attention), these announce major subjects and ideas.

2. **Purpose Sentence.** If present, a purpose sentence will be found in the first paragraph of a book, chapter or article. The statement tells you what the rest of the text will be about.

3. **Pre-Outline or Overview.** A sentence(s) or phrase(s) which lists the ideas to be developed in that section of the text.

4. **Topic Sentence.** A sentence that states the subject and focus of the following material.

5. **Italics and/or Boldface Type.** Main ideas that stand out from the rest of the text.

6. **Repetition.** Repetition of a key word or idea throughout a text indicates that it is a major topic to be remembered.

7. **Questions.** Questions invite you to look for answers. These answers are often a major idea that is being developed.

8. **Numbering.** Ideas that are numbered are important. When studying these ideas, write them down as a list with a title at the top. This can become your main idea mind map.

9. **Visuals.** Pictures, graphs, diagrams, figures, and other visual materials usually highlight and emphasize main ideas that need to be remembered.

10. **Details.** The use of examples, statistics, and other details (illustrations, tables, charts) always signal that a main idea is being clarified, proven, or developed. The main idea may be ahead or behind these details in the text.

11. **Patterns of Organization:** When the text is organized in a pattern, this signals a main idea. Patterns can include like topics, the comparison of two objects, cause and effect, or problem and solution discussions. When you recognize such a pattern look for the main idea(s).

12. **Summary.** Summaries at the end of the text re-state the main idea in an abbreviated form.