Distinguishing Relevant from Irrelevant Information

Learning the Skill

When geographers are trying to learn about our planet, they must sift through a great deal of information. It is necessary for them to identify what is relevant, or important, and to separate that information from other data that are not necessary for their work. For example, geographers may want to learn how the climate of a region is changing. Relevant information would include changes in temperature, winds, and rainfall. Information that is irrelevant to this topic would include changes in government or cultural traditions.

To distinguish relevant from irrelevant information, follow these steps:

- Identify the main topic of the material.
- Determine which supporting ideas are directly related to the topic.
- Identify sentences or ideas that do not seem to be related to the main topic.
- Sort through the information you think might not be relevant. Try to connect it to the main topic.
- If you cannot make a connection, then it is probably irrelevant.

✓ Practicing the Skill

Directions: Read the information below. Then fill in the chart that follows with relevant and irrelevant information.

Monsoon Winds and Climate

Winds are a powerful force in creating climates. In Asia, the monsoon winds cause huge seasonal changes each year. During the summer, the winds flow from southeast to northwest. This occurs because the land at that time of year is warmer than the ocean. The hot air over the land rises. The air from the ocean flows toward land. These winds carry moist air, which causes long periods of heavy rain.

Summer is not a good time for tourists to visit. During winter, the winds blow in the opposite direction. At this time of year, the land is colder than the ocean. The air over the ocean rises. Winds move from land to sea, northwest to southeast. These winds are very dry. During this season, there is little rainfall. Large earthquakes can cause tidal waves along the coasts of Asia.
Critical Thinking Skills Activity
continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant Information</th>
<th>Irrelevant Information</th>
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✔ Applying the Skill

Directions: Read the information below, and then answer the questions that follow.

Growing Crops in the Desert

For thousands of years, people who have lived in dry climates have found ways to grow crops. One of the best examples is found in Egypt. There, the Nile River flows through a desert. The river provides a plentiful supply of water. The challenge was to get the water from the river into the desert. Almost every year, the Nile does this naturally when it floods its banks. In ancient Egypt, people merely waited for the floods to supply them with water for their crops. The problem was how to irrigate their crops during the rest of the year. Of course, people surrounded by water year-round do not have to worry about this problem.

Egyptian farmers solved the problem by digging channels into the riverbank. Then they began to direct the flow of the river into the fields. These channels were probably the first irrigation systems on Earth. Egyptians also invented a simple device called a shadoof, which used buckets to pull water out of the river and into the channels. With these systems, farmers were able to bring water to their crops. A high percentage of Egyptians live along the Nile.

1. Finding the Main Idea  What is the main topic of the information?

2. Identifying  What is an example of irrelevant information in the first paragraph?

3. Specifying  What information in the second paragraph is directly related to the main topic?