

Main Point
(So, what's the point?)

Point of the Assignment: To learn how to find a thesis statement (main point).

Learning how to find the main point is a foundational skill that you will need in order to succeed in school. Being able to detect the main point will help you with your critical thinking, reading comprehension, writing, speaking, memorization, note taking, time management, priority setting, test taking, interviewing and information gathering skills.

The main point is called a thesis statement. Its purpose is to get the author's point across. The author will assert his point of view; and it is usually done in a single sentence. The thesis statement is normally asserted early, and often (but not always) **IS** the first sentence.

You may not realize it, but you have been practicing finding the main point in every one of the handouts you have done in this class thus far. At the end of each assignment, you are asked to write down the main point of the assignment and identify why you were expected to do the assignment. The intent of those questions is to help you to develop your critical thinking skills.

As you will learn when you take your college-level writing classes, a standard essay has five paragraphs: Introduction, body (three) and conclusion. Basically, the introduction tells you what you are going to say, the body says it in detail, and the conclusion restates (summarizes) what you have just said.

The introductory paragraph may contain an attention-grabber such as an interesting fact, question, joke, or story. Then the thesis statement is clearly asserted. After the thesis statement, there will be three subtopics listed which are designed to support the thesis. Subtopics are designed to convince you of the writer's point of view.

The second, third and fourth paragraphs are the body of the essay. This is where the author takes each subtopic idea and develops it further. The body paragraphs usually begin with a transition such as "First, Second, Third, Next, In addition, However, Therefore, and Accordingly." Transitions also come in the form of "going from the familiar to the unfamiliar" (For example, it might read "Not only does point 'Point A,' support my thesis statement, but so does 'Point B'.") **Transitions will clue you in on to the idea that the author is changing the subject.** After the transition, the author will state the thesis for the subtopic of this paragraph. Then the paragraph will go into more detail, and usually offer some examples. The detail is designed to help you truly understand what the author means by the subtopic thesis statement. In other words, the details and examples do for the subtopic what the subtopics do for the main point. A good

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writer will give such detail as to draw a mental picture that allows you to see in your mind what he is describing.

The last paragraph should be the conclusion where the author summarizes what the essay says by restating the thesis statement (as a reminder) and three supporting details. The conclusion paragraph should end with a “so what” statement, or why should the reader care.

Keep in mind that this is just a “standard essay.” Once a person learns to communicate in the “standard essay format” he or she will be encouraged to learn other styles as well – that is in non-standard formats. **In other words, not all writing and/or speaking will follow this format.** However, once you understand how a standard essay works, then you will be much better able to identify the main point. You will also be able to recognize when a communication plan does not follow this plan.

With a non-standard essay format, these elements mentioned may be there. They may not be there. They may be implied rather than clearly stated. These elements may be there, but not in the place you would expect. The challenge then, for you as the reader, is to learn to identify those elements that are there, those that are implied, or those that are missing altogether.

The reason it is important to understand the difference between a main point, supporting point, and examples is so that you can take in a large amount of information, language, writing, speaking, etc. and make it make sense. **In other words, you will be able to take three pages of text and break them down into five sentences. Then you can use those five sentences to help you reinforce the author’s main point.**

To help you learn to discern the main point and identify sub points, examples, transitions, etc., you are going to analyze two essays: **1) “My Name is High” follows the standard format. 2) “Mama Bear” does not.** First analyze “My Name is High” to find all of these elements. Then analyze “Mama Bear” to find out what is there, what is not, and what is implied.

Analyzing a paper to find the main point

ESSAY #1: “My Name is High”

Answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the title? _____
- 2) What do you think the title reveals about the essay? _____

Essay Body:

Introduction:

How does the introduction begin? _____

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What did the author use as an introduction? _____
(i.e., what is the attention-grabber: interesting fact, question, joke, or story)

What is the thesis statement? _____

What are the subtopics? _____

Subtopic #1:

How does Subtopic #1 begin? _____

What kind of transitions does the author use? _____
(i.e., First, Second, Third, Next, In addition, However, Therefore, and Accordingly, or Familiar-to-Unfamiliar, not used, etc.)

What is the subtopic thesis statement? _____

What are the subtopic examples? _____

Subtopic #2:

How does Subtopic #2 begin? _____

What kind of transitions does the author use? _____
(i.e., First, Second, Third, Next, In addition, However, Therefore, and Accordingly, or Familiar-to-Unfamiliar, not used, etc.)

What is the subtopic thesis statement? _____

What are the subtopic examples? _____

Subtopic #3:

How does Subtopic #3 begin? _____

What kind of transitions does the author use? _____
(i.e., First, Second, Third, Next, In addition, However, Therefore, and Accordingly, or Familiar-to-Unfamiliar, not used, etc.)

What is the subtopic thesis statement? _____

What are the subtopic examples? _____

Conclusion:

How does the conclusion begin? _____

Was the thesis statement restated? How? _____

Were the subtopics restated? How? _____

What is the “so what” statement? _____

Now in the space below, outline the essay by writing the thesis statement, supporting points, and the conclusion.

Thesis statement: _____

3 supporting subtopics: 1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Conclusion: _____

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Next, reflect on this outline for a few minutes. Turn this paper over and try to rewrite from memory the main points of the essay on the back of this assignment without referring back.

ESSAY #2: "Mama Bear"

Answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the title? _____
- 2) What do you think the title reveals about the essay? _____

Essay Body:

Introduction:

How does the introduction begin? _____

What did the author use as an introduction? _____

(i.e., what is the attention-grabber: interesting fact, question, joke, or story)

What is the thesis statement? _____

What are the subtopics? _____

Subtopic #1:

How does Subtopic #1 begin? _____

What kind of transitions does the author use? _____

(i.e., First, Second, Third, Next, In addition, However, Therefore, and Accordingly, or Familiar-to-Unfamiliar, not used, etc.)

What is the subtopic thesis statement? _____

What are the subtopic supporting details? _____

What are the subtopic examples? _____

Subtopic #2:

How does Subtopic #2 begin? _____

What kind of transitions does the author use? _____

(i.e., First, Second, Third, Next, In addition, However, Therefore, and Accordingly, or Familiar-to-Unfamiliar, not used, etc.)

What is the subtopic thesis statement? _____

What are the subtopic examples? _____

Subtopic #3:

How does Subtopic #3 begin? _____

What kind of transitions does the author use? _____

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(i.e., First, Second, Third, Next, In addition, However, Therefore, and Accordingly, or Familiar-to-Unfamiliar, not used, etc.)

What is the subtopic thesis statement? _____

What are the subtopic examples? _____

Conclusion:

How does the conclusion begin? _____

Was the thesis statement restated? How? _____

Were the subtopics restated? How? _____

What is the “so what” statement? _____

Now in the space below, outline the essay by writing the thesis statement, supporting points, and the conclusion.

Thesis statement: _____

3 supporting subtopics: 1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Conclusion: _____

Next, reflect on this outline for a few minutes. Turn this paper over and try to rewrite from memory the main points of the essay on the back of this assignment without referring back.

Application to learning in general:

Relate this assignment, which you just completed, to the standard questions listed below.

What do you see?

Why would these questions be listed at the end of the assignment?

How is this related to the topic of “critical thinking?”

How is this related to learning and developing good study skills?

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Test your understanding:

What is the main point of this assignment?

Why were you expected to do this exercise?

What type of person would need to do this exercise?

How well do you fit the profile of the person for whom this assignment was created?

Reflection: *(Write down your response after completing this assignment.)*
