

This handout should be used in conjunction with the topic and main idea audio podcast.

Topic

The topic is who or what the passage is about. It is broad and must cover all of the details in the passage. The topic should be only a few words. Sometimes, one word is enough.

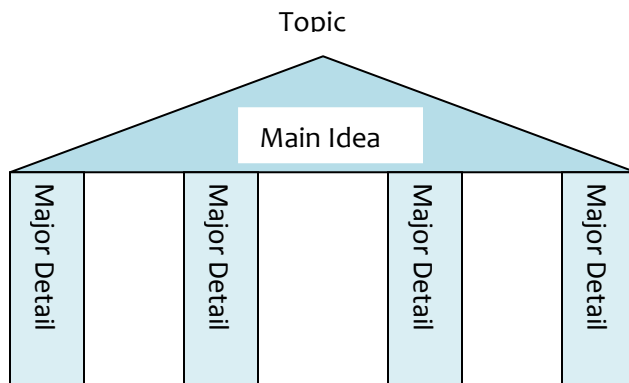
Tips for Topics:

1. Ask yourself “What is the one idea this passage is about?”
2. The topic is usually the word or words most often repeated in the passage.
3. Remember to watch for synonyms, words which have the same meaning, and pronouns such as it, they, he and she, that take the place of the topic.
 - a. Example: **Caffeine** is a powerful drug. **It** is a mood-altering drug that makes one feel alert and full of energy. However, this **powerful drug** may raise heart rates, reduce fertility, and interfere with sleep.

Main Idea

The main idea is the point the author is making about the topic. A Main idea should be written in a complete sentence and should be broad enough to cover all of the supporting details but not so broad that it is not supported.

Think of the topic and main idea as a house:



Topic – Large enough to cover the main idea completely, but does not cover ideas not stated

Main Idea – Completely covered by the topic and completely supported by the major details

There are no major details not covered by the main idea.

Tips for Main Ideas:

1. First, identify the topic. Then, identify the main point the author is trying to make about the topic.

2. By identifying the major details, you can make sure you have the entire main idea and it is completely supported in the paragraph.
3. Main ideas and Topic sentences are very similar. The difference is a main idea should be in your own words, paraphrased, and a topic sentence is stated by the author. (Inferred main ideas, main ideas not directly stated, are on another podcast.)
4. Thesis and theme also mean main idea.
5. If you are not sure how to identify major details, check out the podcast and handout on supporting details.

Practice:

These practice examples are discussed in order on the podcast. Try them on your own before listening to the explanation.

The following paragraphs have main ideas which actually topic sentence. This means the main idea is stated in the author's own words.

1. Swimming is a sport of strength and endurance. Strength allows the swimmer to pull through the water harder and faster. It also makes each kick more potent. Swimmers need to have high endurance. If a swimmer's muscles and energy level wear out, it will not matter how powerful each kick was at the beginning of the race.

Topic _____

Main Idea _____

2. There is no such thing as another day at the office for an elementary school teacher. Teachers must make sure their lesson plans meet the objectives set in place by their administration and are enticing enough to their students that they want to learn. Teachers also must be the parent figure in a classroom when teaching students about responsibility and friendship. Finally, teachers must be friends to their students. A friend is needed for students who need someone special they can trust. Teachers must deal with many responsibilities throughout the course of a day.

Topic _____

Main Idea _____

3. Ever wonder who is looking at your Facebook and MySpace postings? You should. College enrollment personnel are using the personal postings on Facebook and MySpace to decide whether or not to accept students who are on the edge. College enrollment staff look at what applicants are posting on these accounts. Areas the enrollment workers are looking for are obvious poor behavior; such as DUI,

inappropriate pictures and wild activities.

Topic: _____

Main Idea: _____

The following articles' main ideas are not topic sentences. This means the main idea is in the paragraph, but it is not stated clearly enough to contain the entire main idea.

4. Driving in a car during a blizzard can be extremely dangerous. Drivers need to worry about losing control of their vehicle and getting stuck in the snow and being unable to get out. White outs during a blizzard are also very dangerous. White outs are when an individual loses visibility because of snow. People have been known to walk a foot away from their front door and become so disoriented they are found frozen to death later.

Topic: _____

Main Idea: _____

5. Toyota dealerships began working on accelerator pedals when another recall was announced. The Toyota Company expanded their recall list to include the brakes on the 2010 Prius hybrid. Customers complained that when the car hit a bump, the brakes temporarily did not work. Toyota has made the promise to fix these problems before any new care is made.

Topic _____

Main Idea _____

6. Craig's boss constantly looked over his shoulder. He felt his boss was there just to find details Craig missed. If Craig was two minutes late for work, his boss would dock him an hour. Craig wasn't the only employee dealing with this unpleasant man. His boss counted how many personal phone calls each employee received and made it a point to be in the same room during the call. Other employees have already quit, but Craig can't because he has a family to support. However, he realizes his health is deteriorating with numerous migraines, increased alcohol consumption and a burning in his gut. Craig isn't the only one. Problems such as Craig's are being identified by others as health problems created by stress in the workplace.

Topic _____

Main Idea _____

Answer Key:

1. Topic: swimming
Main Idea: Swimming is a sport of strength and endurance.
2. Topic: Teacher responsibilities
Main Idea: Teachers must deal with many responsibilities throughout the course of a day.
3. Topic: College enrollment decisions and personal postings

Main Idea: College enrollment personnel are using the personal postings on Facebook and MySpace to decide whether or not to accept students who are on the edge.

4. Topic: Blizzard dangers

Main Idea: Blizzards can be extremely dangerous.

5. Topic: Toyota problems

Main Idea: Toyota is working to fix the problems with their recalled vehicles.

6. Topic: Health problems and workplace stress

Main idea: Various health problems are caused by workplace stress.