2.2: READING & WRITING BASICS – TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

WHAT IS THE POINT? THESIS AND MAIN IDEAS

What is the difference between the thesis and main ideas?

Activity

To learn about thesis and main idea, take notes on the in-class lecture using Cornell Notes.

MORE ABOUT MAIN IDEAS

Main ideas provide the structure for our efforts at communication. You may also know main ideas under their alias, “topic sentence.”

In reading we analyze main ideas to better understand what an author or speaker is trying to communicate.

In writing we use main ideas to organize paragraphs so that our audience can better understand what we are trying to communicate.
**STATED MAIN IDEA**

Stated main ideas are exactly what they sound like – main ideas that are directly stated in a passage. You can literally underline or highlight a stated main idea in a text, and you should do this when you are reading a textbook for a class.

**IMPLIED MAIN IDEA: WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SAY?**

The word *implied* means "suggested but not directly expressed." Use this definition to help you define "implied main idea."

What is an “implied main idea?”

How is an implied main idea different from a stated main idea?

**HOW TO FIND THE ELUSIVE MAIN IDEA**

How can you identify the main idea in a text or spoken communication? Whether you are looking at a stated main idea or an implied main idea, the following strategies can help.

**Strategy 1:**

Ask yourself:

- What is the point of the piece?
- What is the one thing the author/speaker wants me to know about this?

**Strategy 2:**

If you are still struggling to locate the main idea, back up and identify the topic. The *topic* is a word or phrase that the paragraph is about.

Then ask yourself “what about” the topic? This is likely the main idea.

It never hurts to discuss the piece with another person. Sometimes this helps you to clarify your understanding.

**Strategy 3 – for implied main ideas:**

Read the passage for which you are seeking a main idea. Look for words or ideas that are repeated frequently. Then use Strategy 2 to derive your own version of a main idea statement.

**Activity**

Your instructor will provide you with a text.
Work with a partner to identify the main ideas in the text. The class will regroup to discuss our findings.

MAIN IDEAS AND DETAILS ARE IN A RELATIONSHIP

Main ideas and supporting details have a pretty simple relationship. The main idea is the center of attention, and the supporting details function to, well, support the main idea. If these were two people, this would be a pretty unfair relationship, but in writing or speaking, it is entirely acceptable. After all, only one idea can be the ‘focus.’

Whether you are reading, treasure-hunting to find main ideas and supporting details in your textbook, or you are writing an essay, a graphic organizer can be a helpful tool. There are all kinds of cute little graphic organizers and metaphors for working with main ideas and supporting details, but sometimes it’s more efficient to use a simple diagram.

![Main Idea Diagram](image)

Activity

Return to the article we used to practice identifying main ideas earlier in this section.

Your instructor will assign you and your partner/group a paragraph from the reading. Use the structure in the graphic organizer above to organize the main idea and details in the paragraph.

Be ready to share your results.

Look Ahead

Check your syllabus. What assignments are coming up to which you will apply your understanding of main ideas and supporting details? When will this be due?