

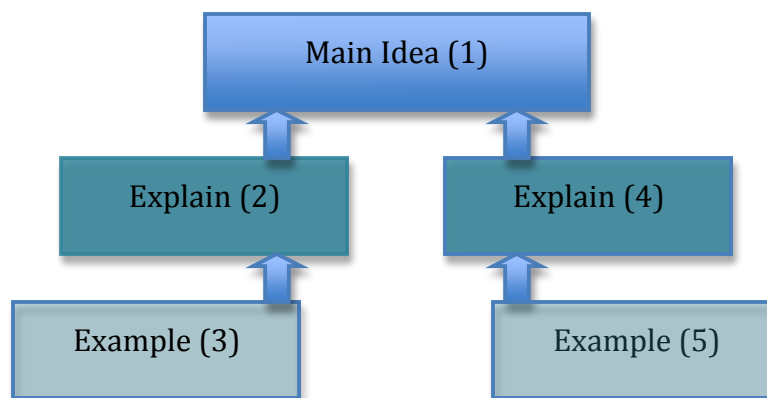
Main Idea and Supporting Sentences

Last week we covered what a main idea sentence was: a sentence that names the topic, and allows the reader to understand the focus of the paragraph to follow. It is logical then that the rest of the sentences in the paragraph support the main idea sentence. Support means that they either explain something about the topic, or they offer an example. Read the paragraph below. The main idea is underlined. Support that explains is **bolded**, and support that offers an example is in *italics*.

My parents were very strict when I was growing up. **My mother in particular was always correcting my behavior.** *One day when I forgot to look both ways when I was crossing the street, my mother made me go back home; she said that I could not go out at all if I could not be safe.* **My father was more concerned with my grades.** *Every night he would make me go to my room before I could watch television.*

Let's examine the pattern for this paragraph. The first sentence (1) presents the main idea, that my parents were strict. The second sentence (2) explains what I mean by "strict," by saying that my mother was strict in correcting my behavior. The third sentence (3) offers an example of how she would correct my behavior. The fourth sentence (4) explains further, that my father was strict when it came to schoolwork, and then the fifth sentence (5) offers an example of how he was strict.

If we were going to diagram the paragraph, it would look like this:



One way to talk about whether a sentence directly supports the main idea (the second level), or indirectly supports the main idea (the third level) is to call them **MAJOR** detail sentences or **MINOR** detail sentences. Major details directly explain something about the topic, while minor details offer examples for the Major detail that came right before.

Practice I: Read the paragraphs, and then identify each sentence as either a main idea, a major detail, or a minor detail sentence.

Single parents have to overcome many obstacles to return to school. If the child is very young, finding quality babysitting can be difficult. Many babysitters are unreliable and that can mean that the parent has to miss many classes, which can hurt their grades. It is also hard to find enough time to study. Children require a lot of attention and are also noisy, and that can interfere with a parent being able to complete their homework. Finally, raising children is expensive. Many single parents discover that they can't meet the costs of both raising children and paying for tuition, books and fees.

Sentence #1: _____

Sentence #2: _____

Sentence #3: _____

Sentence #4: _____

Sentence #5: _____

Sentence #6: _____

Sentence #7: _____

My grandmother turned 70 last year and celebrated by going skydiving. She said she always wanted to try and figured it was now or never. Many people think that when you get older you can no longer do fun things, but this is not true. The senior center in town offers dance lessons and also takes groups to the art museum. The classes are always full because so many people want to try new things. Towns are even developing senior living communities around activities such as golf and tennis. Those communities are very popular because people like to live with others who share their interests.

Sentence #1: _____

Sentence #2: _____

Sentence #3: _____

Sentence #4: _____

Sentence #5: _____

Sentence #6: _____

Sentence #7: _____

Practice II: Below you will find several main idea sentences. Provide appropriate supporting sentences following the pattern of Major-Minor-Major-Minor.

1. It is not a good idea to watch a lot of television.

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Major: _____

Minor: _____

2. Coaches have good reasons to be firm with the players on their team.

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Major: _____

Minor: _____

3. Many people believe it is a bad idea to spank children.

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Major: _____

Minor: _____

4. There are several steps I can take to be successful in college.

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Major: _____

Minor: _____