

Lesson 1
Day 1

Date: _____

Main Topic, Details,
and Staying on Topic

A **main topic** is a thought or idea that provides general guidance for a writing. A main topic tells what the writing will be about. A main topic is not necessarily a complete sentence; it can be any thought ranging from a sentence or more, to a single word.

A. Write an **X** on the lines below which are acceptable as main topics.

1. ___ submarines
2. ___ cats
3. ___ the process of blacktopping a driveway
4. ___ how to fix a car
5. ___ clouds

B. What is the **main topic** of the four sentences below?

1. There are many types of nails that are used to build houses.
2. Lumber used to build a deck must be pressure treated.
3. Shingles need to be of high quality if the roof is going to last.
4. Make sure to use thick insulation to ensure efficient heating and cooling.

C. If we were to add the following sentence to the four sentences above, would it fit appropriately into a paragraph? Circle the correct answer.

Cinder blocks and mortar are used to build a strong foundation.

yes or no

Lesson 1
Day 2

Date: _____

Main Topic, Details,
and Staying on Topic

A. Which of the following sentences would **not** belong in a paragraph with the given **main topic**? Write an **X** by each sentence that does not belong.

1. Main Topic: **educational subjects**

- a. ___ I am taking Algebra this year.
- b. ___ My neighbor is Ms. Walters.
- c. ___ A good writing course will help me communicate more effectively.
- d. ___ History is one of my favorite subjects.

2. Main Topic: **countries**

- a. ___ Venezuela is located in South America.
- b. ___ Canada is located in North America.
- c. ___ Asia is a large continent.
- d. ___ Japan is a small country located in Asia.

3. Main Topic: **types of food**

- a. ___ Italian foods usually include a lot of pasta based dishes.
- b. ___ Japanese foods usually have fresh fish and vegetables as ingredients.
- c. ___ American cuisine is varied and uses a lot of beef and vegetables.
- d. ___ Some fields are used to grow plants that yield high levels of sugar for bio-fuels.

4. Main Topic: **modes of transportation**

- a. ___ I mow the lawn every week with my father.
- b. ___ Spaceships travel through space.
- c. ___ My two feet will take me about anywhere I wish to go.
- d. ___ A unicycle is tricky but fun to ride.

Main Topic, Details, and Staying on Topic

All writings have a main topic and details that make up the writing. Even the smallest single paragraph has a main topic (unless it is a rambling nonsensical paragraph). Of course all writings have details that form the body of the writing.

Regardless of the type of writing, it will consist of one or more paragraphs. Each paragraph should have the following three parts: a **topic sentence**, **detail sentences**, and an **ending sentence**.

The first sentence of a paragraph is usually the **topic sentence**. It is slightly indented (to the right) in relation to the rest of the paragraph. The **topic sentence** tells **generally** what the paragraph is about, but it does not provide specific detail about the paragraph. The topic sentence's primary purpose is to get the attention of the reader.

The **detail sentences** come after the topic sentence and form the **body** of the paragraph. The **body** of the paragraph is perhaps the most important part of the paragraph since it contains the detail of what the paragraph is about. All detail sentences should be related to the **topic sentence**, which means that the **detail sentences** should only discuss things that are suggested by the **topic sentence**. Making sure that the **detail sentences** and **topic sentence** are related within a paragraph is called **staying on topic**.

The **ending sentence** restates the topic sentence (using different words) and can also summarize the information contained in the detail sentences.

A. Answer the following questions.

1. Which part of a paragraph is probably the most important?
 - a. detail sentences
 - b. topic sentence
 - c. ending sentence
 - d. the main topic

2. What is a topic sentence supposed to do?
 - a. It tells the reader all about the following paragraph.
 - b. It summarizes the paragraph before it.
 - c. It provides an ending to the ending sentence.
 - d. It grabs the attention of the reader.
3. What is the goal of the detail sentences?
 - a. to physically fit into the paragraph
 - b. to stay on topic with the topic sentence
 - c. to set up the ending sentence
 - d. to have at least ten words
4. What is the body of a paragraph made from?
 - a. detail sentences
 - b. topic sentences
 - c. the topic sentence and the detail sentences
 - d. none of the above

B. Circle the following main topic that would be the best fit for each paragraph below.

1. I like to sit on the swing on the back porch and watch the world go by. Right behind my house is a busy road. I can watch the many different types of cars, trucks, bicycles, and people moving by. Sometimes my whole family sits on the porch and watches the clouds roll in. Sometimes this means a storm is on the way. As soon as it starts raining, we go inside.
 - a. things to do outside
 - b. things my family likes to do together
 - c. we like watching things as we sit on the swing
 - d. swings are a great place to sit
2. Picking a place to eat can be a big job. First of all you have to ask those who will be dining with you if they have a preference for a particular type of food. Next, you need to decide how much time you have to eat your meal (fast food or a sit-down dinner). Then, you need to decide how much money you want to spend on dinner. Lastly, you need to find out if there are any restaurants nearby that satisfy the answers to the preceding questions.
 - a. going out to eat is fun
 - b. it can be hard to find the right restaurant
 - c. some people do not like eating the same things as others
 - d. it's easy to find a place to eat where everyone agrees

Lesson 1
Day 4

Date: _____

Main Topic, Details,
and Staying on Topic

A. Write your own topic sentence and an ending sentence for the main topic **pizza**.

Topic Sentence:

Write your own four detail sentences for the main topic **pizza**.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

B. Ending Sentence:

Compare and Contrast Essay

In this lesson you will draft a **six** paragraph **compare and contrast essay**. A compare and contrast essay takes two or more things and compares (tells how they are alike) and contrasts them (tells how they are different). When a writing assignment asks you to analyze, to interpret, to compare and contrast, to demonstrate a cause and effect, or to take a stand on an issue, it is likely that you are being asked to develop a thesis and to support it persuasively in your writing.

What are the main differences between an essay and other types of writings?

First of all, an essay must be a true piece of writing. As soon as an author starts making up a plot, setting, characters, or adding details to a story that did not happen, the story transitions from an essay to a fictional writing.

Essays may be descriptive, use narration, answer questions, provide solutions to perceived problems, or slightly embellish, but they should not add to or change the real facts for descriptive purposes. In other words, an essay may be creative in the way the author explains his position or point of view but **not** when it comes to altering the real facts or events of the writing.

All essays have a definite beginning, middle, and end. The beginning portion of an essay must have a thesis statement, which acts as the central focus for the entire writing. An essay should be long enough to completely discuss, argue, prove, or relate the main idea of the essay (the thesis statement). Finally, essays must consist of three or more paragraphs.

Develop and write a six paragraph (one introductory paragraph, four body paragraphs, and one concluding paragraph) compare and contrasting essay using the following writing process:

Outlining Process

- A. Complete the rough outline
- B. Complete the final outline

Drafting Process

- A. Complete the rough draft
- B. Edit the rough draft
- C. Complete the final draft

Outlining Process

Choose one of the following main topics and write a **compare and contrast essay**:

- two different sports
- two United States presidents
- vacationing somewhere warm or cold

After selecting your **main topic**, write it in the main topic section of the rough outline found on Day 2 of this Lesson. Later you will use the main topic to develop a **thesis statement** (lesson 20). A thesis statement can be more than one sentence, but it must be supported by solid, referenced research that will be explained further in the body of your writing.

IMPORTANT! Before you start building your rough outline, the **main topic** you chose from the list above will require some outside research. You will conduct this research to develop details for your rough outline. For this exercise you will develop four facts for the **main topic** you selected. When building your rough outline, each of these facts will become its own **subtopic** (paragraph).

A) Complete the necessary research for your main topic. Also, make sure the main topic you selected is written in the rough outline.

Compare and
Contrast Essay

Outlining Process

The entire Outlining Process is explained in **Appendix B**. If you need help in completing the rough outline or the final outline, use Appendix B. Whether or not you use Appendix B, you still need to complete the rough outline and the final outline located on the following pages.

Complete the rough outline

Rough Outline

Main Topic:

Subtopic #1: _____

Details: _____

Subtopic #2: _____

Details: _____

Subtopic #3: _____

Details: _____

Subtopic #4: _____

Details: _____

Complete the final outline

Final Outline

Introductory Paragraph:

Subtopic #1:

Topic Sentence:

Detail Sentences:

Ending Sentence: (written after the topic sentence and detail sentences)

Subtopic #2:

Topic Sentence:

Detail Sentences:

Ending Sentence: (written after the topic sentence and detail sentences)

Subtopic #3:

Topic Sentence:

Detail Sentences:

Ending Sentence: (written after the topic sentence and detail sentences)

Subtopic #4:

Topic Sentence:

Detail Sentences:

Ending Sentence: (written after the topic sentence and detail sentences)

Concluding Paragraph:

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Compare and
Contrast Essay

Edit the rough draft

It is now time to **edit** the rough draft you wrote on Day 3. Use the editing marks shown in **Appendix C** to correct any mistakes.

Do your paragraphs say what you want them to say? Do the words you chose make sense?

Look for and fix the following errors: 1) incorrectly used, misspelled, or misplaced words, 2) incorrect or missing spacing, 3) incorrect, missing, or misplaced punctuation, and 4) incorrect or missing capitalization.

