

2 More about Point and Support

Making a Point

Look at these two sentences:

___ My brother's car is a Toyota.

___ My brother's car is a lemon.

One of these sentences could be the point of a paragraph, with reasons and details to support the point. The other sentence does not express an idea or opinion. It is just a fact that does not call for any support. Put a check (✓) next to the sentence that is a point.

“My brother's car is a Toyota” is just a fact. It does not need any support. On the other hand, “My brother's car is a lemon” expresses a point, or opinion, that needs support. The writer has to back up the statement with specific reasons or examples or details. Then we would know *why* he or she thinks the car is a lemon.

Here in a nutshell is what effective writing is about: **making a point** and then **supporting that point** with solid evidence. Think of your reader as someone who is not going to simply believe anything you say. Instead, the reader will want you to provide solid evidence for whatever point you are making.



ACTIVITY 4

Put a check (✓) in front of the point (it can also be called the *idea* or *opinion* or *topic sentence*) in each pair of sentences below.

1. ___ A. I have a fever of 102.
___ B. I must be getting the flu.
2. ___ A. Some people deal with conflict by getting angry.
___ B. People deal with conflict in different ways.
3. ___ A. Last summer I had a job in a fast-food restaurant.
___ B. Working in a fast-food restaurant is the worst job I ever had.
4. ___ A. There is often no hot water in the apartment in the morning.
___ B. The apartment is not a good place in which to live.
5. ___ A. I am bored by school.
___ B. There are reasons why school bores me.
6. ___ A. People often use their cell phones while driving.
___ B. Some people have dangerous driving habits.
7. ___ A. My sister is an ambitious woman.
___ B. My sister works two jobs during the day and then goes to school at night.
8. ___ A. It rained every day during our vacation.
___ B. Our vacation turned out to be a disaster.

9. ___ A. The monster movie was poorly made.
___ B. The movie monster was just a spider that had been filmed through a magnifying lens.
10. ___ A. There are many problems in our schools.
___ B. Children who are troublemakers can prevent other students from learning in class.

Supporting a Point

Look at the following point:

Point: You should not put your hand into that box.

This statement hardly stops us from putting our hand in the box. “Why do you say that?” we would probably ask. “Give your reasons.” Support is needed so that we can decide for ourselves whether a good point has been made. Suppose the point is followed by these three reasons:

- 1 A flesh-eating spider the size of a large crab just crawled into the box.
- 2 Inside the box are freshly cut leaves of poison ivy.
- 3 A loaded mousetrap is inside, ready to spring.

As you will surely agree, the details do provide solid support for the point. They give us a basis for understanding and agreeing with the point. After seeing these details, we probably won't be putting a hand anywhere near the box.

We see here, then, a small example of what clear thinking and writing is about: making a point and providing support that truly backs up that point.



ACTIVITY 5

Following are groups of four sentences. In each case, one sentence is the point or idea, and the other three sentences are details that support and develop this idea. Put a check (✓) in front of the point or idea in each group.

1. ___ A. The burgers are full of gristle.
___ B. The roast beef sandwiches have a chemical taste.
___ C. The Beef and Burger Shop is a poor fast-food restaurant.
___ D. The french fries are lukewarm and soggy.
2. ___ A. My little brother is really getting into the spirit of Halloween.
___ B. Today I found a plastic spider in my soup.
___ C. Last night there was a bloody rubber hand on my pillow.
___ D. This morning a cardboard tombstone with my name on it appeared in the backyard.
3. ___ A. Spanking teaches physical violence.
___ B. Spanking is a bad idea.
___ C. Spanking often has more to do with the parent's lack of self-discipline than the child.
___ D. Many studies have shown that spanking does not work.

4. ___ A. The neighborhood park is not a safe place to play.
___ B. Large stray dogs often roam the park.
___ C. Gangs hang out in the park.
___ D. Broken glass litters the ground of the playing fields.
5. ___ A. When you are in a theater, you sometimes have to put up with rude people and crying children.
___ B. At home, you can “pause” a movie when you want to leave the room.
___ C. It’s more fun to watch movies at home than in a theater.
___ D. It’s great to watch movies in your pajamas while sitting in your favorite chair.
6. ___ A. My family is difficult to cook for.
___ B. My father is a vegetarian.
___ C. My grandmother, who lives with us, can’t digest certain vegetables.
___ D. One of my brothers is allergic to milk, wheat, and eggs.
7. ___ A. Credit cards have high interest rates.
___ B. People should try not to use credit cards.
___ C. Credit cards encourage people to spend more money than they have.
___ D. Many credit cards charge yearly fees in addition to monthly interest.
8. ___ A. Students can type and print out reports on a computer.
___ B. The Internet provides an endless supply of information for research papers.
___ C. Computers have made it easier for students to do their work.
___ D. A computer can be used to take a class at home.
9. ___ A. English was an extremely hard course this year.
___ B. I had to do at least three hours of homework for every hour I was in class.
___ C. The teacher called on students without warning and deducted points when they didn’t know an answer.
___ D. I had to write five essays, give three oral reports, and take two major exams.
10. ___ A. Three times a week, I was the last or next-to-last one chosen by team captains.
___ B. I was the one who couldn’t run a relay race without falling down and throwing up.
___ C. I was always the ones assigned to stand in right field, where baseballs were seldom hit.
___ D. Physical education class was a nightmare for me, reinforcing the image I had of myself as a klutz.