

Thesis, Main Ideas, and Supporting Details

Terminology

A **paragraph** is a group of sentences that relate to one another because they discuss the same **topic**. Each paragraph consists of a **main idea**—one that expresses the *general* overarching topic—and **supporting details**—sentences that *specifically* support, expand upon, or reinforce the main idea. The sentence within the paragraph that explicitly states the main idea is called the **topic sentence**. Sometimes main ideas are **implied** (no single sentence expresses the idea). The broad sentence that states the overarching idea of an entire essay (made up of multiple paragraphs) or is called the **thesis statement**.



General or Specific?

- General: parts of speech
 - Specific: verb, noun, adjective, adverb, preposition
- General: eating utensils
 - Specific: fork, spoon, knife
- General: Toyota cars
 - Specific: Prius, Camry, Yaris, Corolla, Avalon
- General: Western European countries
 - Specific: Spain, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany



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Topics=General

- Give me the general **topic** for...
- Wendy's, Taco John's, Burger King, Subway
- Bed, couch, easy chair, coffee table
- Northeast, Pacific Northwest, Midwest, South
- Floss, toothpaste, toothbrush, mouthwash
- Algebra, statistics, geometry, calculus
- Period, comma, colon, semicolon, question mark

Details=Specific

- Give me some specific **details** for...
- U.S. Presidents
- Emotions
- Breakfast foods
- Soft drinks
- Types of tests
- Office supplies

Topics, Main Ideas, Details

- Topics
 - Single word/short phrase
 - Ask, *"What is this selection about?"*
- Main Ideas
 - The key, general point of a paragraph
 - Not all paragraphs have a main idea (descriptive, background info, implied)
 - If there is a main idea, it comes in the topic sentence, which can be found anywhere
 - Ask, *"What is the author's point about the topic?"*
- Major Supporting Details
 - Reinforce, support, expand on the *main idea* (more specific)
 - Consist of examples, facts, or reasons
 - Ask, *"who, what, when, where, why, how?"* (reporter's questions).
- Minor Supporting Details
 - Reinforce, support, expand on the major supporting details (even more specific)
 - Consist of examples, facts, or reasons
 - Ask, *"who, what, when, where, why, how?"* (reporter's questions).

*Some sentences aren't any of these!

Practice

Communication apprehension, or nervousness, can take two forms. People who are apprehensive about communicating with others in any situation are said to have *trait anxiety*. People who are apprehensive about communicating with others in a particular situation are said to have *state*, or *situational*, anxiety. Take a moment to consider whether you are trait anxious or state anxious in communication situations. Do you fear all kinds of interactions or only certain kinds? Most of us experience some level of state anxiety about some communication events, such as asking a boss for a raise, verbally evaluating another's performance, or introducing ourselves to a group of strangers.

-Griffin, Cindy L. *Invitation to Public Speaking*. 4th ed., Cengage, 2004, p. 12.

Topic: What is this selection about?

Main Idea: What is the author's point about the topic?

What kind of proof does the author use to support his/her point?

Practice

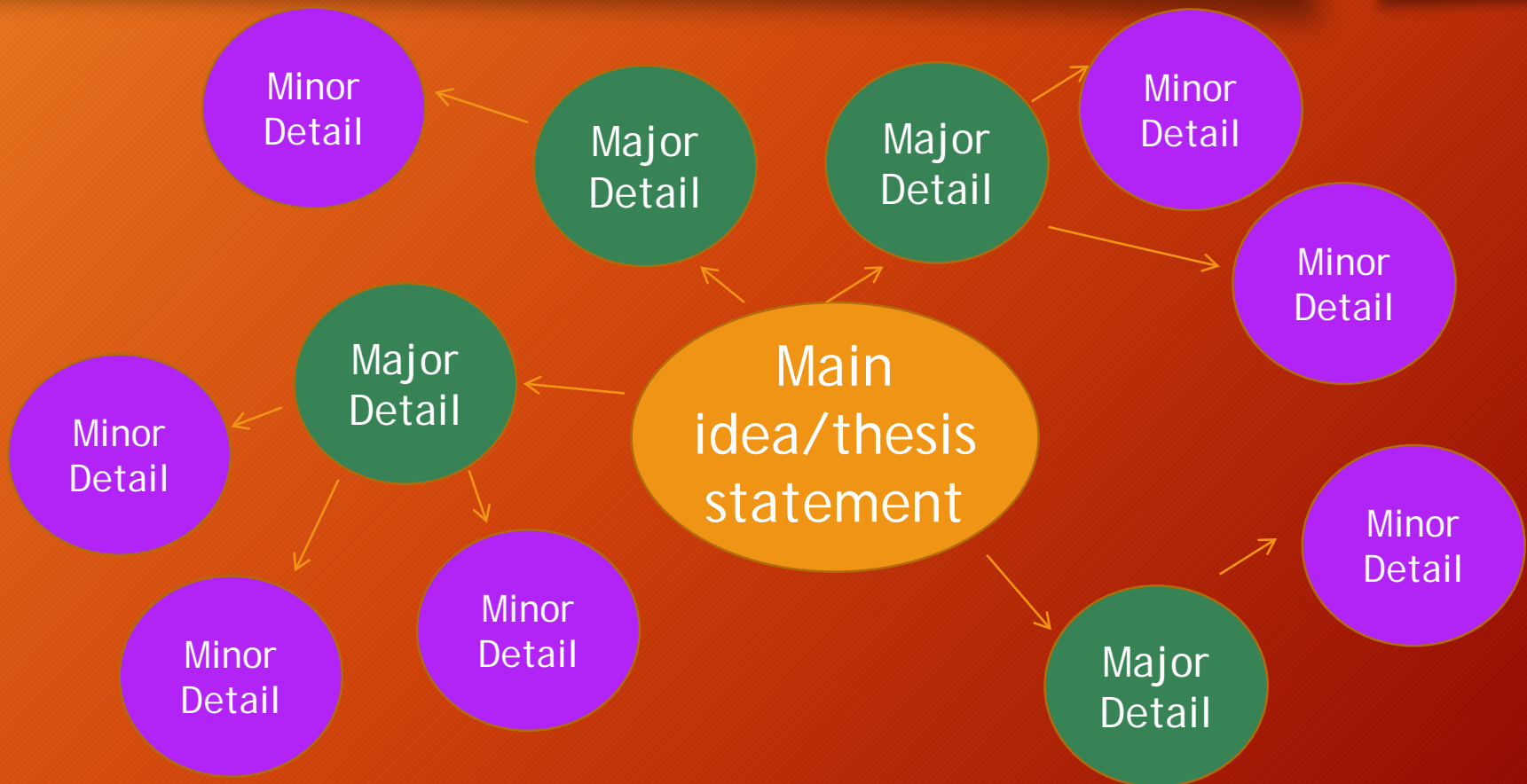
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Topic: Communication Apprehension

Main Idea, Major Supporting Detail, Minor Supporting Detail

Mapping: Visualize and Organize



*Arrows show the relationship between ideas; similar to hierarchies in Ch. 7

Outlining

Title:

I. Main heading

A. Subtopic

B. Subtopic

1. Major supporting detail

2. Major supporting detail

a. Minor supporting detail

b. Minor supporting detail

i. Sub-idea

ii. Sub-idea

- Each new level of info is indented
- Usually need two or more points for each sub-point (to show it is worthy of expansion)
- Usually text is written in short words/phrases
- Informal outlines may be less strict on the levels being identified beyond the Roman numerals
 - Might use dashes or bullets instead

Return to Paragraph Practice

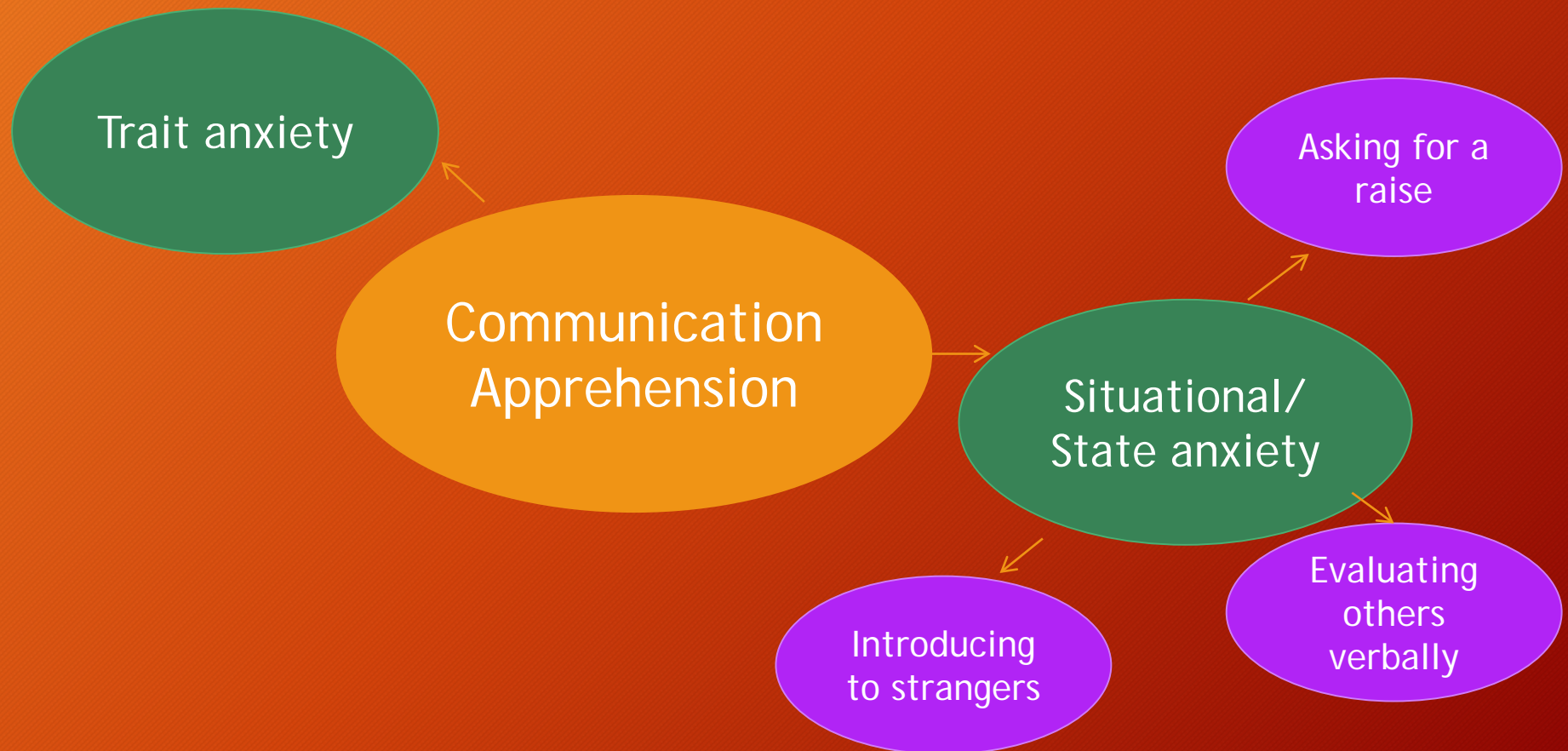
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Topic: Communication Apprehension

Main Idea, Major Supporting Detail, Minor Supporting Detail

Sample Concept Map



Sample Outline

- I. Communication apprehension has two forms.
 - A. Trait Anxiety
 1. Those apprehensive about communicating with others in any situation
 - B. Situational/State Anxiety
 1. Those apprehensive about communicating with others in a particular situation.
 - a. E.g. Asking boss for a raise
 - b. E.g. Verbally evaluating others
 - c. E.g. Introducing ourselves to strangers