

# Putting It All Together

## Commentary

Page 92 of *Acting on Words* asks you to consolidate what you have learned in Chapter 6 on thesis statements and outlining, introductions, bodies, and conclusions. You are asked to read an essay by Mark Simpson, “Betraying the Spirit of Punk? ‘The Card Cheat’” and to think specifically about how it is shaped. Page 92 presents a number of questions to help focus this thinking. Here are suggested answers to those questions.

### ***Where is Simpson’s thesis located and what type is it?***

As Chapter 6 points out, in short scholarly essays, a preferred impact location for the thesis is the final sentence of the opening paragraph (the introduction). Chapter 6 also mentions that essay conclusions usually re-state the thesis in some form or other. Chapter 13 “The Summary” offers the added advice to take cues from the essay’s title. Simpson’s title raises a question: does the Clash song “The Card Cheat” betray the spirit of punk? Looking to the end of the introductory paragraph, we find an assertion that this view of the song “would be a mistake.” The final sentence of the opening paragraph then claims that the song “transform[s] what punk means.” In other words, the song *is* punk but in new forms. Checking the final paragraph of the essay, we find this attitude reinforced with paraphrases from an interview with Clash band member Mick Jones. Simpson drives home the paraphrases by suggesting that the “unlikely” musical and lyrical dress of the song allows us to experience punk in an expanded way. These assertions link back to the key opening word “transform.” We can confidently conclude that Simpson’s thesis appears as the final sentence of his opening paragraph.

As to type, the thesis is ***explicit***: that is, the writer comes straight out with his main idea. The thesis is also ***complete*** in providing the three key components of a thesis: topic, controlling idea, and reason[s]. These might be expressed thus:

<b>Topic:</b>	relationship of “The Card Cheat” to punk
<b>Controlling Idea:</b>	“The Card Cheat” unexpectedly <i>is</i> punk
<b>Reasons:</b>	because it contains the usual punk concerns and because the unexpected elements are actually a complex development of those concerns

Simpson’s thesis also serves as a *direct list*, albeit not a highly specific version of the direct list. He does not, for instance, name social and political alienation and oppression. He does, however, refer to these under the more general heading of “concerns.” He also makes clear, as a second reason, that these concerns are expressed in new ways. So the reader is primed to expect a pattern that examines and explains the concerns and the new ways. These general claims may be considered the two listed points for ensuing discussion.

***What principle or strategy of organization does Simpson use to order his paragraphs?***

His opening paragraph uses “the unusual or unexpected fact” technique to grab interest, then provides necessary description (features of the song and why initially it does not seem typical of punk), and then states his thesis. The following three body paragraphs deal respectively with the three sections of the song, so the basic order is spatial, a linear progression through the song structure. This method matches the approach of an exegesis of a poem, signaling a concern with close, detailed observation and interpretation. Paragraph 5 revisits and reflects upon the meanings of points uncovered in the preceding three paragraphs; with all three sections of the song structure examined, paragraph 5 consolidates and explores those points. The final paragraph continues the synthesizing of paragraph 5 but now with an emphasis on the political element, which takes us back to the thesis that “The Card Cheat” is punk.

### ***How are his paragraphs connected to his thesis?***

Each paragraph speaks to the two reasons stated in the direct list: each paragraph gives examples of how the song is punk (themes of alienation and oppression) but done with a difference (not the usual “buzz-saw” approach to music or lyric). The examples build logically through verse order to a complex summing up, in paragraph 5, of what has been found in the verses, followed by a final paragraph that reinforces the thesis. The content of each paragraph clearly relates to the punk themes of alienation and oppression as well as to some aspect of “unlikely” form (melancholy solo piano opening, extended metaphor becoming a social allegory, etc.). Thus each paragraph intensifies support for the claim that the song reflects standard concerns while offering innovations.

### ***What type of introduction is used to lead to the thesis?***

An answer to this is mentioned above; also see p. 101 *Acting on Words*.

The style of conclusion draws mostly on the “exhaustive” method described on p. 103, but through intensification rather than mere repetition of the essay’s main points.

## **Writer’s Outline and Notes to Himself**

Author and English professor Mark Simpson has attained a level of professional skill that allows him to conceptualize his outline and rhetorical action plans without having to write them down. But if he had written out an outline and action notes, here is how they might have looked:

<b>Title</b>	Find one that focuses attention on the central concern; perhaps use a question so that readers seek the answer, which is the thesis.
<b>First paragraph</b>	Since the song is “unexpected,” use the unexpected fact as an opening hook. Describe the song features, showing why it is unexpected. State thesis.

**Topic**                what is the song's true relationship  
to punk?

**Controlling idea**     The song *is* punk.

**Reason1**            It develops the usual themes  
(alienation/oppression)

**Reason 2**           The seeming non-punk treatment is  
really an *expansion* of punk

**Second paragraph**        How verse one reflects reason 1 and 2  
                                         1 specifics of alienation and oppression  
                                         2 the melancholy solo piano

**Third paragraph**            How verse 2 develops reasons 1 and 2  
                                         1 momentary rise in gambler's fortune only signals  
                                         imminent fall  
                                         2 sophisticated musical embodiment as music rises  
                                         in thirds before falling

**Fourth paragraph**        How verse 3 develops reasons 1 and 2  
                                         1 theme moves toward the overtly and broadly  
                                         political  
                                         2 the central metaphor and its extension  
                                         demonstrate increasing complexity

**Fifth paragraph**            How the concluding line reinforces reasons 1 and 2  
                                         1 theme of hopelessness culminates  
                                         2 grammatical instability deftly signals this theme,  
                                         further demonstrating sophisticated art

**Sixth paragraph**

Reinforce the political and social goals while paraphrasing Mick Jones to reinforce that these are pursued in new complex forms, which are themselves necessary to the spirit of individual and social assertion.