> **Important Note**: Main Point questions appear infrequently in
> GMAT Critical Reasoning. However, we have included this
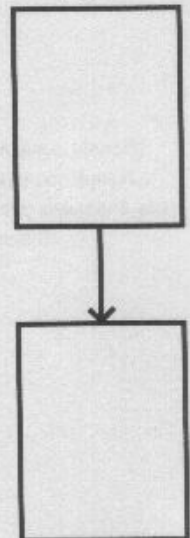> question type for two important reasons:
>
> 1. The process of identifying the main point is invaluable
>   when you are attempting to perform other tasks with an
>   argument, such as Weaken, Strengthen, etc.
>
> 2. Main Point questions appear frequently in GMAT Reading
>   Comprehension, and therefore a discussion of this question
>   type will benefit you when you face Reading
>   Comprehension passages.

Main Point questions may be the question type most familiar to test takers.
Many of the standardized tests you have already encountered, such as the SAT,
contain questions that ask you to ascertain the Main Point. Even in daily
conversation you will hear, "What's your point?" Main Point questions, as you
might suspect from the name, ask you to summarize the author's point of view.

From a classification standpoint, Main Point questions are a subcategory of
Must Be True questions and fall into the First Family type. As with all First
Family questions, the answer you select must follow from the information in the
stimulus. But be careful: even if an answer choice must be true according to the
stimulus, if it fails to capture the main point it cannot be correct. This is the
central truth of Main Point questions: like all Must Be True question variants the
correct answer must pass the Fact Test, but with the additional criterion that the
correct answer choice must capture the author's point.

Because every Main Point question stimulus contains an argument, if you apply
the methods discussed in Chapters Two and Three you should already know the
answer to a Main Point question by the time you read the question stem.
Primary Objective #2 states that you should identify the conclusion of the
argument, and the correct answer choice to these problems will be a rephrasing
of the main conclusion of the argument. So, by simply taking the steps you
would take to solve any question, you already have the answer to a Main Point
question at your fingertips. Be careful, though: many Main Point problems

First Family
Model:

feature a structure that places the conclusion either at the beginning or in the middle of the stimulus. Most students have an unstated expectation that the conclusion will appear in the last sentence, and the test makers are able to prey upon this expectation by creating wrong answers that paraphrase the last sentence of the stimulus. To avoid this trap, simply avoid assuming that the last sentence is the conclusion.

The Main Point question stem format is remarkably consistent, with the primary feature being a request for you to identify the conclusion or point of the argument, as in the following examples:

> "Which one of the following most accurately expresses the main conclusion of the argument?"

> "Which one of the following most accurately expresses the conclusion of the journalist's argument?"

> "Which one of the following most accurately restates the main point of the passage?"

> "The main point of the argument is that"

Two Incorrect Answer Types

Two types of answers typically appear in Main Point questions. Both are incorrect:

1. Answers that are true but do not encapsulate the author's point.

2. Answers that repeat premises of the argument.

Each answer type is attractive because they are true based on what you have read. However, neither summarizes the author's main point and therefore both are incorrect.

Because you have already learned the skills necessary to complete these questions, we will use the following two questions for discussion purposes. Please take a moment to complete the following problem:

1. Journalist: A free marketplace of ideas ensures that all ideas get a fair hearing. Even ideas tainted with prejudice and malice can prompt beneficial outcomes. In most countries, however, the government is responsible for over half the information released to the public through all media. For this reason, the power of governments over information needs to be curtailed. Everyone grants that governments should not suppress free expression, yet governments continue to construct near monopolies on the publication and dissemination of enormous amounts of information.

Which one of the following most accurately expresses the conclusion of the journalist's argument?

(A) The freedom of the marketplace of ideas is in jeopardy.
(B) Preserving a free marketplace of ideas is important.
(C) The control that governments have over information needs to be reduced.
(D) Ideas that have malicious content or stem from questionable sources can be valuable.
(E) Governments have near monopolies on the dissemination of many kinds of information.

The conclusion to this argument is the fourth sentence, which begins with the conclusion indicator "For this reason..." By applying the Primary Objectives you should have identified this conclusion while reading, and then, upon classifying the question stem you should have looked for a paraphrase of this sentence. Answer choice (C) fits the bill, and is the correct answer.

Answer choice (A): The author would agree with this statement but this is not the Main Point of the argument; rather, it is closer to a premise that might support the conclusion.

Incidentally, the author's general agreement with this answer choice is signalled by the use of "however" in the third sentence. In the stimulus, the author begins by mentioning that a free marketplace of ideas, including dangerous ideas, ensures a fair hearing of ideas. In the third sentence, the author then says, "however, the government is responsible for over half the information released to the public," indicating the author feels the government is a threat to this free marketplace.

Answer choice (B): The author would also agree with this statement, but again this is not the Main Point of the argument. As discussed in the analysis of answer choice (A), the author believes that the freedom of the marketplace of ideas is at risk, and in stating that we should curtail the government's power over information, the author assumes that preserving a free marketplace of ideas is important. Thus this answer choice would be better described as an unstated premise that supports the conclusion.

Answer choice (C): This is the correct answer. Remember, any answer that is a paraphrase of the conclusion of the argument will be the correct answer to a Main Point question.

Answer choice (D): The stimulus specifically notes that malicious or prejudicial ideas can "prompt beneficial outcomes." The outcome of an idea is different from stating the ideas themselves "can be valuable."

Answer choice (E): The stimulus states that "governments continue to construct near monopolies on the publication and dissemination of enormous amounts of information." This phrasing is not the same as answer choice (E), which asserts that the government *already* has a monopoly on the dissemination of *many* kinds of information.

The lesson learned from this particular problem is that you must isolate the conclusion and then look for a paraphrase of that conclusion.

Unlike the question above, many Main Point question stimuli avoid using traditional conclusion indicators and this lack of argument indicator "guideposts" makes your task more challenging. Remember, if you are struggling to identify the conclusion in an argument, you can always use the Conclusion Identification Method discussed in Chapter Two:

> Take the statements under consideration for the conclusion and place them in an arrangement that forces one to be the conclusion and the other(s) to be the premise(s). Use premise and conclusion indicators to achieve this end. Once the pieces are arranged, determine if the arrangement makes logical sense. If so, you have made the correct identification. If not, reverse the arrangement and examine the relationship again. Continue until you find an arrangement that is logical.

If you cannot identify the conclusion in a Main Point question, you must go back and apply this methodology. Otherwise, without the conclusion how can you answer the question?

Please take a moment to complete the following problem:

2. I agree that Hogan's actions resulted in grievous
    injury to Winters. And I do not deny that Hogan fully
    realized the nature of his actions and the effects that
    they would have. Indeed, I would not disagree if you
    pointed out that intentionally causing such effects is
    reprehensible, other things being equal. But in
    asking you to concur with me that Hogan's actions
    not be wholly condemned I emphasize again that
    Hogan mistakenly believed Winters to be the robber
    who had been terrorizing west-side apartment
    buildings for the past several months.

    Which one of the following most accurately
    expresses the conclusion of the argument?

    (A) Hogan should not be considered responsible for
         the injuries sustained by Winters.
    (B) The robber who had been terrorizing west-side
         apartment buildings should be considered to
         be as responsible for Winters's injuries as
         Hogan.
    (C) The actions of Hogan that seriously injured
         Winters are not completely blameworthy.
    (D) Hogan thought that Winters was the person who
         had been terrorizing west-side apartment
         buildings for the last few months.
    (E) The actions of Hogan that seriously injured
         Winters were reprehensible, other things
         being equal.

The conclusion of this argument is difficult to identify because the author does
not use a traditional conclusion indicator. The first three sentences are
admissions by the author regarding the nature of Hogan's actions. The fourth
sentence contains the conclusion and a premise, and the conclusion is that
"Hogan's actions should not be wholly condemned."

If you struggled to identify the conclusion, consider how you might have
applied the Conclusion Identification Methodology to the pieces of the
argument. For example, consider the two parts of the last sentence. If you
thought one of them might be the conclusion, place one as the conclusion and
the other as a premise, as follows:

> "Because I ask that Hogan's actions not be wholly condemned, therefore I
> emphasize again that Hogan mistakenly believed Winters to be the robber
> who had been terrorizing west-side apartment buildings for the past several
> months."

Does that configuration sound right? No. Try again by reversing the premise
and conclusion pieces:

"Because Hogan mistakenly believed Winters to be the robber who had been terrorizing west-side apartment buildings for the past several months, therefore I ask you to concur with me that Hogan's actions not be wholly condemned."

The relationship now sounds much more logical.

Answer choice (A): The author admits that Hogan fully realized his actions and the author asks that "Hogan's actions not be wholly condemned." Both of these statements are counter to the idea that Hogan should not be considered responsible for Winter's injuries.

Answer choice (B): The only reference to the robber is that Hogan mistakenly believed that Winters was the robber. Thus, there is no evidence in the stimulus to support this answer.

Answer choice (C): This correct answer is a paraphrase of the conclusion of the argument.

Answer choice (D): According to the information in the stimulus, this answer must be true. Regardless, the answer is still incorrect because it fails to summarize the author's main point. This type of answer—one that is true but misses the main point—is frequently featured as an incorrect answer in Main Point questions.

Answer choice (E): Like answer choice (D), this statement is true according to the stimulus. But, it is incorrect because it does not capture the main point.

Final Chapter Note

There are three elements remaining in this chapter: a review of Main Point questions; a brief Must Be True and Main Point Question Stem Mini-Drill; and two more Main Point questions with complete explanations. Please complete each element in the order presented and read the explanations carefully.

Main Point Question Type Review

From a classification standpoint, Main Point questions are a subcategory of Must Be True questions and thus fall into the First Family type.

The Main Point is the same as the conclusion of the argument. By applying the Primary Objectives you should already have the answer to a Main Point question by the time you read the question stem.

The correct answer choice must not only be true according to the stimulus, it must also summarize the author's point. Avoid answers that are true but miss the point of the author's argument.

Must Be True and Main Point Question Stem Mini-Drill

Each of the following items contains a question stem from a recent LSAT question. In the space provided, categorize each stem as either a Must Be True or Main Point question, and notate any Except (X) identifier you see. *Answers on Page 108*

1. Question Stem: "Which one of the following statements is most strongly supported by the information above?"

   Question Type: _____

2. Question Stem: "The information above provides the LEAST support for which one of the following?"

   Question Type: _____

3. Question Stem: "The educators' reasoning provides grounds for accepting which one of the following statements?"

   Question Type: _____

4. Question Stem: "Which one of the following most accurately expresses the argument's conclusion?"

   Question Type: _____

5. Question Stem: "Which one of the following can be inferred from the passage above?"

   Question Type: _____

Must Be True and Main Point Question Stem Mini-Drill Answer Key

1. Question Type: Must Be True

In this case, the "most strongly supported" is used with the intent of proving one of the answers correct. Hence, this is a Must Be True question.

2. Question Type: Must Be True X

The presence of "LEAST" makes this an Except question and the presence of the phrase "support for which one of the following" adds the Must Be True element. The four incorrect answer choices Must Be True; the correct answer choice is not necessarily true.

3. Question Type: Must Be True

"Accepting which one of the following statements" is identical to asking you to find the answer that is proven by the information in the stimulus. Hence, this is a Must Be True question.

4. Question Type: Main Point

In asking for the argument's conclusion, the stem asks you to identify the Main Point of the argument.

5. Question Type: Must Be True

The word "inferred" means must be true. Hence, this is a Must Be True question.

Main Point Question Problem Set

Please complete the problem set and review the answer key and explanations. *Answers on Page 110*

1. Last month OCF, Inc., announced what it described as a unique new product: an adjustable computer workstation. Three days later ErgoTech unveiled an almost identical product. The two companies claim that the similarities are coincidental and occurred because the designers independently reached the same solution to the same problem. The similarities are too fundamental to be mere coincidence, however. The two products not only look alike, but they also work alike. Both are oddly shaped with identically placed control panels with the same types of controls. Both allow the same types of adjustments and the same types of optional enhancements.

    The main point of the argument is that

    (A) the two products have many characteristics in common
    (B) ErgoTech must have copied the design of its new product from OCF's design
    (C) the similarities between the two products are not coincidental
    (D) product designers sometimes reach the same solution to a given problem without consulting each other
    (E) new products that at first appear to be unique are sometimes simply variations of other products

2. Prediction, the hallmark of natural sciences, appears to have been possible by-reducing phenomena to mathematical expressions. Some social scientists also want the power to predict accurately and assume they ought to perform the same reduction. But this would be a mistake: it would neglect data that are not easily mathematized and thereby would only distort the social phenomena.

    Which one of the following most accurately expresses the main conclusion of the argument?

    (A) The social sciences do not have as much predictive power as the natural sciences.
    (B) Mathematics plays a more important role in the natural sciences than it does in the social sciences.
    (C) There is a need in the social sciences to improve the ability to predict.
    (D) Phenomena in the social sciences should not be reduced to mathematical formulas.
    (E) Prediction is responsible for the success of the natural sciences.

Main Point Problem Set Answer Key

Question #1. MP. The correct answer choice is (C)

Like the majority of Main Point question stimuli, the argument does not contain a traditional conclusion indicator. Thus, you must look at the pieces of the argument in order to determine the point the author is making. In this case, the conclusion is "The similarities are too fundamental to be mere coincidence." Use the Conclusion Identification Method to help establish that point if you are unsure. The argument uses the fact that the two workstations are similar and were released in the same timespan to assume that the similarity is not caused by coincidence.

Answer choice (A): This is a repeat of a premise of the argument, not the main point. As mentioned in the discussion, in Main Point questions you should expect to see incorrect answers that repeat premises from the argument.

Answer choice (B): The statement does not pass the Fact Test. The scenario could be reversed: OCF could have copied Ergotech. Regardless, this is not the main point.

Answer choice (C): This correct answer is a paraphrase of the conclusion.

Answer choice (D): This would undermine the argument and thus it cannot be the main point.

Answer choice (E): Although the author would likely agree with this statement, this does not capture the main point, which addresses the two named products.

Question #2. MP. The correct answer choice is (D)

Like the previous problem, the conclusion is in the middle of the argument and is not prefaced by a conclusion indicator. Get used to seeing this format on Main Point questions! The author states that prediction has been made possible by reducing phenomena to mathematical expressions and that some social scientists want to have this same power. The author argues that it would be a mistake to allow social scientists to have this ability. The conclusion, therefore, is "But this would be a mistake."

Answer choice (A): The author says, "some social scientists also want the power to predict accurately," so the author would likely agree with this statement. Regardless, this is not the main point of the argument. Again, be careful with answers that are true according to the author—do they also address the main point?

Answer choice (B): The author might very well agree with this statement, although there is not enough information to assert that this statement is true based on the stimulus (the words "more important" are a bit strong). Regardless, this answer choice does not address the main point of the argument and is therefore wrong.

Answer choice (C): While the social scientists may believe this is true, the author's point is a different one—that social scientists ought not perform a mathematical reduction. And, because the author believes that prediction is apparently made possible by reducing phenomena to mathematical expressions, the author would likely disagree with this statement.

Answer choice (D): This is the correct answer. The conclusion states that it would be a mistake for social scientists to have the ability to reduce phenomena to mathematical expressions. Answer choice (D) is a paraphrase of that idea.

Answer choice (E): This point is not addressed in the stimulus.