

Main Idea Strategy 1 - Four Corners Method: Informing Future Doctors MCAT Study Plan

Link to the test taking strategy video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6FYrCZpeKQ>

The Main Idea (MI) is the key to the CARS section of the exam. Approximately 85% of CARS questions can be answered with a great Main Idea alone. But even so, the term “Main Idea” is so overused that it’s a source of confusion for many students. When asked, “what is the Main Idea”, most students will say it’s a simple summary or it’s “what the author is trying to get across”. This isn’t entirely false, but it’s missing the point of writing a Main Idea.

The point of writing a MI is to force your mind to organize the passage and apply it to get questions correct. You MUST look at it like this when writing MI’s or you will miss the main benefit from authoring them.

A great Main Idea is a brief 1-2 sentence explanation of what the author was trying to accomplish, their opinion of the passage material, and the larger supporting arguments they gave to validate their opinion. This sounds simple enough, but for most, it’s very tough to master. Therefore, we’ll do this in 3 steps across the duration of the program.

Step 1: 4-Corners Method (Weeks 1-10)

In the 4-Corners Method, your goal will be to identify and write down the 4 CARS Competencies of a passage. By the time you test, you will combine all 4 competencies below to create your true main idea.

- Immature Main Idea – what does the author want you to get from this, what is the central idea? Some people look at this as a thesis, but it will likely not be a traditional 3-point thesis.
- Arguments – what stories/examples did the author use? What points were they trying to drive home? *Remember, the author is choosing to put these arguments into the passage. They are there to support the thesis.*
- Tone – How does the author feel about the subject matter? Are they supportive? Skeptical? Are they enthusiastic about Picasso’s paintings or are they condescending?
- Author’s Intentions/Motivations – Is the author trying to persuade you to purchase a dog? Do they just want to teach about Socialism? Or is she arguing for legal reform for labor laws? These are very important because it allows you to put yourself in the author’s shoes when answering questions.

Example:

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| IMI: Formalist criticism looks at work objectively as the words on the page | Arguments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ideal Reader- Importance on what author chose to include |
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| | - Deemphasize “good rhetoric” |
| Tone: Authoritative/Instructive | Author’s Intentions: To inform the reader about what the true formalist critic is and why that’s the best way to critique literature |

Notice how I am using a lot of shorthand, especially in the arguments section? This is purposely done, because the intent of this is just to help ME organize my thoughts.

