The CLAIM

Review: Pre-Writing – THREE STAGES **IN ORDER**

I. Brainstorming

II. Provisional Claim

III. Outlining

**The Claim**

The claim is the **single most important sentence** in your essay. Your essay’s task is to SUPPORT the claim.

Your claim **IS** your argument….

It MUST be A SENTENCE, not a question.

It MUST be ONE sentence, not several.

The writer MUST know what his or her claim is.

You CANNOT make an OUTLINE without a CLAIM.

Your claim must be developed in your essay, not just paraphrased.

Your claim is made up of a TOPIC – which is more general and often but not always just given, and your **FOCUS** which is the core of the claim.

Your FOCUS must be just that: **focused**, one idea more specific than the topic, yet developed in the paragraphs after, in the rest of your essay.

Your FOCUS **is NOT A LIST of THREE** things: that’s how you learned to write in school, but this is university –

This is **WRONG**:

“There are three reasons why AUCA is a good university, first, the instructors, second, the liberal arts curriculum, and third, English is the language on instruction.”

This claim is NOT WELL-FOCUSED.

This is BETTER:

“There are many reasons why AUCA is a good university, but none more important that the excellent cafeteria.”

Topic = AUCA a good university

**FOCUS:** EXCELLENT CAFETERIA

Q: What is my essay going to be about? – **The excellent cafeteria**

What are my topic sentences in each body paragraph going to support?

**The excellent cafeteria**

What are my quotes and evidence going to support?

**The excellent cafeteria**

What idea am I going to DEVELOP in my essay?

**The excellent cafeteria**

**MORE**

An essay is an ARGUMENT - not just a presentation of facts.  That’s called a summary.  Do you know what an argument is?  It means that there is a difference of opinion and one person provides evidence to convince the other person.  It means that there is more than one answer to the question, but we judge that answer on the basis of the argument given.  The goal of an essay is to CONVINCE the reader that the claim is valid, reasonable and well-argued.

    You will use facts IN your essay, but your claim cannot be a fact – that would be a summary.  In other words, your claim must be arguable or debatable. When you think you have a claim, imagine possible objections and counterarguments.

A claim is made up of a TOPIC and a FOCUS.

    The topic is something GENERAL.  There's a LOT someone can say about it, not just one thing – if that were true, it would be a fact. You need to actually say MORE to create a claim.  Your claim is your opinion or stance the thing that you are going **to ARGUE** in your essay - by that I mean, the stance or opinion you are going **to support** in your essay.  Topics are often given: “Write an essay on the importance of exercise to physical health.’ The topic is ‘the importance of exercise,’ but that’s too general – we need to do more work.

    Think of it this way - ask yourself the question, "What is the most important element of your general topic?"  **Your answer will be your claim**.  That ‘most important element will be your **FOCUS**. Is it an objective fact that the most important element is x?  No - another person can say it is y.  How do we judge?  On the basis of their argument.

    For example: if I say "the most important element of university education is learning how to be an adult."  Is this a fact?  No - it's an argument.  Another person can say, "No, the most important element of university education is learning a skill."  Is that a fact?  No, it’s an argument.  They are both about 'university education,' that is the topic, but the arguments are different: one supports 'learning how to be an adult," – the focus - the other supports 'learning a skill,' – the focus.  What we need now is for each person to support their claim - and that IS what each statement is - a claim - through evidence, facts, data, reason and argumentation.

      So we have two claims here: "the most important element of university education is learning how to be an adult" and "the most important element of university education is learning a skill." they are both claims because they are arguable.  BUT ONE person has to argue ONE claim, not both.  An essay must have ONE claim.  In fact, a good claim - not just a claim - **a claim is arguable - a GOOD claim is one WITH A FOCUS**. In the example "the most important element of university education is learning how to be an adult" that person's focus is 'learning how to be an adult.'  Their WHOLE essay is going to support, develop and defend this idea - 'learning how to be an adult.'  Every body paragraph is going to support that idea.

     The second person's claim is "the most important element of university education is learning a skill."  Their FOCUS is 'learning a skill.'  All of their body paragraphs are going to develop, support and defend this idea - skill-learning.