

THE TOPIC SENTENCE

WHAT IS A TOPIC SENTENCE?

A topic sentence indicates what a paragraph is about, what it will describe of discuss.

It is usually the first sentence in the paragraph. If you are a beginning rather than a professional or advanced writer, the first sentence of your paragraphs should be the topic sentences. This will remind you, as well as tell your reader, what the topic is and what you intend to say about it.

A topic sentence should narrow down or LIMIT the paragraph to an EXACT POINT. A good topic sentence controls the paragraph *by setting very clear and definite limits to the topic.*

The following are examples of good topic sentences:

Camping can be an inexpensive vacation.

Television is (not) rightly called a vast wasteland.

You can find my house easily if you follow my directions.

You should contribute to the United Way for several reasons.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TOPIC SENTENCE AND A TITLE?

A topic sentence is a sentence within a paragraph. It is *not* set off from or above a paragraph as a title is from the main body of a composition.

A topic sentence is always a complete thought, whereas a title is usually not a complete thought.

TITLE: *The Art of Changing a Tire*

TOPIC SENTENCE: *Too few drivers appreciate the art of changing a tire.*

TITLE: *What To Do In Case of a Flat Tire*

TOPIC SENTENCE: *All drivers should know what to do in case of a flat tire.*

Notice the difference in capitalization in the title as well as in the topic sentence; several words of a title are capitalized, but only the first word of the topic sentence is capitalized.

Another important difference between a topic sentence and a title is that a topic sentence limits the paragraph, whereas a title expands it. The title is less specific than the topic sentence.

Purpose of the Paragraph	Two Things to Include in the Topic Sentence		Examples
	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Focus</i>	
To illustrate [explain by examples]	General Statement	Introduction to examples	<i>Many small businesses have had to shut down this winter for a number of reasons.</i>
To tell a story	Incident	Basic facts [who, where, when, how]	<i>One Thursday last month in the college cafeteria, seven young men planned a prank that turned the entire college upside down.</i>
To tell a personal experience	Incident	The importance of the experience; how you felt	<i>In November 1980, when my parents sent me an airline ticket from Belize to New York City so that I could join them, I was scared and unsure of my future.</i>
To describe	The thing, person, or scene	The main overall impression	<i>My block, at Avenue M and East 19th Street, is an exciting place to live.</i>
To give directions	The task to be explained	The most important thing to know	<i>To make a good Italian spaghetti sauce, a beginning cook must have patience.</i>
To argue or persuade	Point being argued	Argument for or against	<i>Teenagers should be more outspoken about protecting their rights.</i>
To define a word or term	The word or term being defined	The general category it belongs to and what makes it different from the rest of the category	<i>The Wankel engine is a gasoline-burning engine that uses a circular - or rotary - motion instead of the straight-line motion of the piston engine.</i>
To analyze or classify	The thing being analyzed or classified	The groups or parts that make it up	<i>In any type of gambling, there are three important factors: the original money paid (or the "bet"), the change involved, and the "payoff."</i>
To compare or contrast	The two things to be compared	The main thing learned by the comparison	<i>When I compare my elementary school today with what it was like when I went there ten years ago, I see that there is much more learning going on now.</i>