

Writing Center

TOPIC SENTENCES

Each paragraph must have a topic sentence to identify the subject of the paragraph and to inform the reader about the writer's purpose for the paragraph. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of the paragraph and serves as an introduction.

An effective topic sentence has two parts:

1. a limited topic
2. an opinion or idea about the subject

In addition, a topic sentence must present an idea that can be developed and supported with examples and details. A mere statement of fact is not suitable because there will be little to say to develop the idea.

Suitable topic sentence: Michael Jackson is an unstable pop star.
It is possible to support this opinion with examples about Jackson's lack of stability.

Unsuitable topic sentence: Michael Jackson is a pop star.
This is a fact; it does not require further support and will not permit development in a paragraph.

To write an effective topic sentence, limit your subject to a single aspect of a single subject. Do not try to write about every aspect of football; instead, write about the quarterback or the training or the shoes. Instead of writing about every aspect of computers, write about spreadsheets or web page design.

After you limit your subject, think about possible opinions that you can express about the subject. Perhaps you think the quarterback is the least important player of the football team or that the training is done under dangerous conditions. You might feel that a certain web page has too many colors or it difficult to use.

Combine your limited subject and your opinion to create a topic sentence for your paragraph:

The quarterback is the least important player on a football team.
Football training is performed under very dangerous conditions.
The AOL web page is not user friendly.

Do not make an announcement for your topic sentence.

Unsuitable announcement in topic sentence: My paper is about collies being ideal house pets.

Better topic sentence: Rabbits make ideal house pets.

Unsuitable announcement in topic sentence: This writer believes that the football team does not really need a quarterback.

Better topic sentence: A football team does not need a quarterback to win games.

After you have written your topic sentence, you are ready to develop support for the rest of the paragraph.

Practice

Read the topic sentences below. Draw one line under the limited topic and two lines under the opinion about the topic.

Example: My mother worries about trivial details.

1. Peanut butter is less nutritious than advertisers say it is.
2. My neighbors neglect their dog.
3. A college degree is not necessary for all high-paying jobs.
4. Good writing skills can improve job promotion opportunities.
5. Summers in Virginia are uncomfortably humid.
6. Japanese cars are made better than American cars.
7. Children's video games are too violent.
8. My dog has a good sense of humor.
9. The Division of Motor Vehicles is more organized than it was five years ago.
10. My sister spends money on frivolous things.