

Paragraph writing:

A paragraph is a group of sentences that develops one main idea. A paragraph may stand by itself as a complete piece of writing, or it may be a section of a longer piece of writing, such as an essay.

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your ability to set margins, to double space the text, and to paginate. Your instructor will also explain other specific information needed for turning in written assignments (such as your name, the class, and the date of submission). This information may be placed on a separate title page. Standard paragraph form will require consistent margins, an indented first sentence, a capitalized word at the beginning of each sentence, and correct punctuation to end each complete sentence. These are the basic requirements that all students must be able to meet in order to do college-level work. While you are studying in college, you will need to become comfortable using a computer, so take this opportunity to learn new word processing skills. For example, if you have never paginated a paper before or you have never used the spell-check option, explore these features. Find something new to learn. Because jobs for your generation will demand computer literacy, you will need to have an enthusiastic attitude about learning new skills on the computer.

Standard Paragraph Form Type the following sentences into a standard paragraph. Follow your instructor's requirements for margins and spacing. Then print out your work, being sure to check the page for typos and other errors. 1. The local high school became a haven for disaster victims. 2. In the large basement, thirty families huddled in little groups of four or five. 3. Volunteer workers were busy carrying in boxes of clothing and blankets. 4. Two Red Cross women stood at a long table sorting through boxes to find sweaters and blankets for the shivering flood victims. 5. One heavyset man in a red woolen hunting jacket stirred a huge pot of soup. 6. Men and women with tired faces sipped their steaming coffee and wondered if they would ever see their homes again. 7. Outside, the downpour continued.

EXERCISE 1

CHAPTER 16 WORKING WITH PARAGRAPHS: TOPIC SENTENCES AND CONTROLLING IDEAS 317

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WHAT IS A TOPIC SENTENCE?

Most paragraphs you read will begin with the topic sentence. However, some topic sentences come in the middle of the paragraph; others come at the end. Some paragraphs have no stated topic sentence at all; in those cases, the main idea is implied. Students are usually advised to use topic sentences in all their work to be certain that the writing has a focus and develops a single idea at a time. Whether the task is an essay exam in a history course, a research paper for a sociology course, or an essay in a composition course, thoughtful use of topic sentences will always bring better results. Good topic sentences help both the writer and the reader think clearly about the main points. Below are two paragraphs. Each paragraph makes a separate point, which is stated in its topic sentence. In both of these paragraphs, the topic sentence

happens to be first. Read the paragraphs and notice how the topic sentence is the most general sentence; it states the main idea of each paragraph. The other sentences explain, describe, extend, or support the topic sentence.

Finding the Topic Sentence of a Paragraph Each of the following five paragraphs contains a topic sentence that states the main idea of the paragraph. Find the sentence that best states the main idea and underline it. Keep in mind that the topic sentence will not always be the first sentence of the paragraph.

1. Mountains of disposable diapers are thrown into garbage cans every day. Tons of yogurt containers, soda cans, and other plastic items are discarded without so much as a stomp to flatten them out. If the old Chevy is not worth fixing, tow it off to sit with thousands of others on acres of fenced-in

EXERCISE 2

A topic sentence states the main idea of a paragraph. It is the most general sentence of the paragraph. All the other sentences serve to explain, describe, extend, or support this main-idea sentence.

I went through a difficult period after my father died. I was moody and sullen at home. I spent most of the time in my bedroom listening to music on the radio, which made me feel even worse. I stopped playing soccer after school with my friends. My grades in school went down. I lost my appetite and seemed to get into arguments with everybody. My mom began to look worried, but I couldn't bring myself to participate in an activity with any spirit. It seemed life had lost its joy for me. Fortunately, something happened that spring that brought me out of my depression. My uncle, who had been disabled while serving in the army, came to live with us. I learned many years later that my mother had asked him to come and live with us in the hope that he could bring me out of myself. I, on the other hand, was told that it was my responsibility to help my uncle feel at home. My mother's plan worked. My uncle and I were both lonely people.

DISTINGUISHING A TOPIC SENTENCE FROM A TITLE

The topic sentence works like a title by announcing to the reader what the paragraph is about. However, keep in mind that the title of an essay or book is usually a single word or short phrase, whereas the topic sentence of a paragraph must always be a complete sentence. Title: Backpacking in the mountains Topic sentence: Backpacking in the mountains last year was an exhausting experience. Title: The stress of college registration Topic sentence: College registration can be stressful.

Distinguishing a Topic Sentence from a Title Indicate whether each of the following examples is a title (T) or a topic sentence (TS) by writing T or TS in the space provided. T 1. The benefits of a college education T 2. The outstanding achievements of aviator Charles Lindbergh TS 3. The president's cabinet faced two major problems T 4. The basis of the Arab-Israeli conflict TS 5. The Mediterranean diet is perhaps the healthiest diet in the world T 6. The astounding beauty of the Rocky Mountains at dusk T

WHAT IS A CONTROLLING IDEA?

A topic sentence should contain not only the topic but also a controlling idea.

The controlling idea of a topic sentence is the point the writer makes about the topic.

Backpacking trips are exhausting.

A particular topic could have any number of possible controlling ideas, depending on the writer's focus. On the same topic of backpacking, three writers might make different points: A family backpacking trip can be much more satisfying than a trip to an amusement park. or Our recent backpacking trip was a disaster. or A backpacking trip should be a part of every teenager's experience.

FINDING THE CONTROLLING IDEA OF A TOPIC SENTENCE When you look for the controlling idea of a topic sentence, ask yourself this question: What is the point the writer is making about the topic? In each of the following examples, underline the topic and circle the controlling idea.
Sealfon's Department Store is my favorite store in town.

The writer of this topic sentence announces that the focus will be on what makes the store a favorite. Sealfon's Department Store is too expensive for my budget.

The writer of this topic sentence announces that the focus will be on the store's high prices.