

## Chapter Three Paragraph Structure

**Paragraph organization** refers to the way sentences are ordered and structured to create a unified and cohesive body of text. The principal features to consider in paragraph organization are **the topic sentence and controlling idea, supporting details, organizational patterns, and signal words**. Together, these features progress a topic and idea from one point to the next, logically and fluidly.

### The Topic Sentence and controlling idea :

The Topic Sentence is an important feature of a paragraph. It is the most general sentence in a paragraph, and it has two parts:

1. **A topic:** the subject or issue being discussed, and
2. **A controlling idea:** a point, opinion, or feeling about the topic. Or It is called the controlling idea because it controls or limits the topic to a very specific point or points.

**Example:** *Snow skiing is a challenging sport with important requirements.*

In this example, the subject of the sentence, snow skiing is **the topic**, and the predicate of the sentence expresses the **point or opinion** about the topic: that it is challenging and has important requirements. As the controlling idea, the rest of the paragraph will serve to develop this point with supporting details.

Ex : **The invention of the light bulb** changed the world in many ways.

-**The invention of the light bulb** ◦ (subject)

-**changed the world in many ways** ◦ (controlling idea)

### Test

Study the following topic sentences. Underline the topic and circle the controlling idea in each one. The first one is done as an example.

1. People can avoid burglaries by taking certain precautions.
2. There are several advantages to growing up in a small town.
3. Most US universities require a 550 point TOEFL score for a number of reasons.
4. Air pollution in Mexico City is the worst in the world for a number of reasons.
5. Fixing a flat tire on a bicycle is easy if you follow these steps.

6. There are several enjoyable ways to travel between the US and Queretaro.

7. Animals in danger of becoming extinct come from a wide range of countries.

8. Effective leadership requires specific qualities that anyone can develop.

9. Industrial waste poured into Lake Michigan has led to dramatic changes in its ability to support marine life.

10. In order to fully explore the wreck of the Titanic, scientists must address several problems.

### **What is the job of the topic sentence?**

It is a helpful guide to both the writer and the reader. The writer can see what information to include and what to exclude. The reader, on the other hand, can see what the paragraph is going to be about and is, therefore, better prepared to understand it. An important point to remember is that a topic sentence is a complete sentence containing both a topic and a controlling idea.

### **The Position of the Topic Sentence**

The topic sentence is usually the first sentence in a paragraph. Experienced writers sometimes put topic sentences at the end, but the best place is usually right at the beginning (why). A topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph gives readers an idea of what they will read. This helps them understand the paragraph more easily.

**a-The topic sentence is typically the first sentence in a paragraph.**

**Example:**

**Penicillin is one of the greatest of the wonder drugs.** It has saved thousands of lives already and will save more in the future. Unfortunately it has no effect at all in most of the ills of mankind. **Penicillin is a very good drug, but it is certainly not a cure-all.**

(The author has split the main idea. This paragraph begins with positive comments on penicillin . The word but signals a shift in thought, and the paragraph ends with a statement of its limitations.)

**b- The topic sentence can come later in a paragraph too.**

**Example:**

The following is a sample paragraph with the topic sentence in the **medial position**:

(When a camera flash is used in a low-light environment, the subject's eyes may appear red in the finished photograph. What is known as "red-eye" is the result of light from the flash reflecting off the pupils of the eyes. **The phenomenon of red-eye can be lessened by using the red-eye reduction feature found on many SLR cameras.** This feature activates a lamp which shines a small light directly into the subject's eyes. When this happens, the diameter of the pupil is reduced, thus tightening the opening in the iris. Since a smaller pupil means a smaller host for the reflection, the chances of red-eye occurring are greatly reduced.)

In the above paragraph, the topic sentence is **The phenomenon of red-eye can be lessened by using the red-eye reduction feature found on many SLR cameras.** It serves to connect information about the cause of red-eye (found at the beginning of the paragraph) with information about how the problem can be alleviated (found after the topic sentence).

**c- The topic sentence can appear in the final position**

The following sample paragraph is an example of one in which the topic sentence and controlling idea appear in the **final position**:

(People do it every day. They log on to their favorite website and browse for hours, checking out bargains. They dump every possible wish into their shopping carts, knowing they can cast each one aside before they finalize their purchases. On the way, they may enter a sweepstakes in the hopes of winning a trip to Cabo San Lucas, or maybe even a new SUV. And then, when they have decided on their purchases, they enter private information without giving it a thought. With a keystroke, they release their personal data into what may or may not be a secure zone. **Despite what much of the public believes, internet shopping is not safe.**)

In this paragraph, the idea that internet shopping may not be safe could be considered controversial. For this reason, groundwork is laid before the final, topic sentence is stated.

## Note:

It is possible for the topic sentence not to appear in the paragraph at all; it can be implied. In this case, the writer has the topic sentence in his or her mind and uses it to control the paragraph. If the writer uses an implied topic sentence, he or she must be sure that the reader can clearly understand the writer's attitude or controlling idea from the flow of ideas in the paragraph.

## The features of a good topic sentence

1-A topic sentence is not a simple fact.

ex: Thomas Edison invented the light bulb.

- This is a detail.
- This could be used in the body of the paragraph.

2- A topic sentence is not a question.

ex : Who invented the light bulb we use today?

- This could be used as an "attention grabber.

3-Not Too General .

Ex : **The history of astronomy is interesting**

This is too general because there is no specific controlling idea. The reader has no idea what the paragraph will say about **history of astronomy** except that it is **interesting**.

4-Not Too Specific .

Ex : Ice age people recorded the appearance of new moons by making scratches in Animal bones

5-A complete Idea and not a fragment

*Incomplete* a- For example Stonehenge in Britain, built 3500 years ago to track the movement of the sun.xxxxx

**b-Talking about smoking. xxxx**

c- *Parents can help their children be successful in school by encouraging them.*  
**Good one.**

### **Example :**

1-Swimming is fun.

This statement is too general to be developed adequately into one paragraph. There is too much to say about the topic.

2- I swim laps for 30 minutes every morning.

This statement is too specific to be developed into a paragraph. There isn't enough to say about the topic.

3- Exercising every morning has several positive effects on my health.✓

### **Test**

Some of the topic sentences below are poorly written. Identify each one of them as : **too general , too specific , good, fact**

1. I like tennis.
2. This paragraph will discuss the benefits of a healthy diet.
3. The Subaru Forester has a 150-horsepower engine.
4. There are many reasons why I enjoy walking tours when visiting new cities .
5. Winters are cold in New England.
6. In Japan, there are two types of marriage.

Q-Answer the questions in your book page 40-42

#### **Gold**

<sup>1</sup>Gold, a precious metal, is prized for two important characteristics. <sup>2</sup>First of all, gold has a lustrous<sup>1</sup> beauty that is resistant to corrosion.<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>Therefore, it is suitable for jewelry, coins, and ornamental purposes. <sup>4</sup>Gold never needs to be polished and will remain beautiful forever. <sup>5</sup>For example, a Macedonian coin remains as untarnished<sup>3</sup> today as the day it was made 25 centuries ago. <sup>6</sup>Another important characteristic of gold is its usefulness to industry and science. <sup>7</sup>For many years, it has been used in hundreds of industrial applications, such as photography and dentistry. <sup>8</sup>The most recent use of gold is in astronauts' suits. <sup>9</sup>Astronauts wear gold-plated heat shields for protection when they go outside spaceships in space. <sup>10</sup>In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

#### **Writing Technique Questions**

1. What is the topic of the paragraph?
2. What two main points does the writer make about the topic?
3. In which two sentences does the writer say that there are two main points?
4. What examples does the writer use to support each point?