

3 | Topic Sentences

Young boys play basketball after school in Havana, Cuba.

OBJECTIVES

- Analyze a paragraph
- Study and write effective topic sentences
- Use commas correctly in sentences
- Identify and write complex sentences
- Write a paragraph

FREWRITE

Look at the photo and write a story about one or all of the boys. Use your imagination. Begin *Every day after school*,... Write five to ten sentences.

ELEMENTS OF GREAT WRITING

What Is a Topic Sentence?

A **topic sentence** states the main idea of a paragraph. It is usually found at the beginning of a paragraph. A topic sentence has several important jobs. It:

- introduces the main idea
- limits or focuses the topic
- often tells the reader how the information will be organized in the paragraph

ACTIVITY 1 | Analyzing a paragraph

Discuss the questions. Then read the paragraph and answer the questions that follow.

1. Can you name three benefits of exercising regularly?
2. What are three reasons that people do not exercise regularly?

WORDS TO KNOW Paragraph 3.1

climb: (v) to go up **in good shape:** (idiom) having good physical condition
improve: (v) to make better **reduce:** (v) to make less

PARAGRAPH 3.1

Reasons for Exercise

There are many excellent reasons for exercising several times each week. First, people who exercise look better. Exercise is important to keep our bodies **in good shape**. In addition, people who exercise have more energy. For example, a person who exercises can walk up stairs or **climb** hills more easily. People who exercise have a healthier heart, too. Finally, exercise **reduces** stress and helps you have a clear mind. Too much stress can cause you to worry a lot, and that is not good for your health. For these reasons, if you want to **improve** your health, you should exercise regularly.



An “anti-gravity” yoga class, where students use silk hammocks to lift themselves off the floor

1. What is the topic sentence? Write it here.

2. What do you expect to read about based on the topic sentence?

3. These words or expressions are very important to the organization of the paragraph. Number them in the same order that they are in the paragraph.

_____ finally _____ first _____ in addition _____ for these reasons

4. Read the last sentence carefully. What do you think the purpose of this sentence is? Begin your answer with *The purpose of this sentence is to . . .*

ACTIVITY 2 | Recognizing good topic sentences

Read each set of sentences. Write the general topic that the sentences share. Then check (✓) the sentence you think is the best topic sentence. Discuss your reasons with the class.

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. General topic: <i>winter</i> | _____ Winter is a good season. |
| | _____ Winter weather is cold, and it snows. |
| | ✓ _____ The best season for children is winter. |
| 2. General topic: | _____ Soccer is popular for many reasons. |
| | _____ For a soccer game, players need a special leather ball. |
| | _____ Soccer is a nice game. |
| 3. General topic: | _____ There are many people in Los Angeles. |
| | _____ People from many different cultures live in Los Angeles. |
| | _____ Los Angeles is a big city in California. |
| 4. General topic: | _____ Monolingual dictionaries have only one language, but bilingual dictionaries have two languages. |
| | _____ Many language students prefer bilingual dictionaries to monolingual dictionaries. |
| | _____ Dictionaries that have two languages, such as French and English, are called bilingual dictionaries. |

Features of a Topic Sentence

A topic sentence has these important features.

- 1. **It has a controlling idea** that limits the topic and guides the flow of the paragraph. The controlling idea tells the reader what you will say about your topic. Here are two topic sentences. The topic is circled and the controlling idea is underlined.
 - Soccer is popular for many reasons.
Explanation: The reader expects the paragraph to explain why soccer is popular.
 - Many language students prefer bilingual dictionaries to monolingual dictionaries.
Explanation: The reader expects the paragraph to explain why this statement is true.
- 2. **It is not a fact.** For example, “Libraries have books” is not a good topic sentence. The information in this sentence is true, but it is a fact and there is little to say about it.
- 3. **It is specific.** “Tea is delicious” is not a good topic sentence because the information in the sentence is too general. If you want to write a paragraph about tea, make your topic sentence more specific, such as “Green tea has many health benefits.”
- 4. **It is not too specific.** “This dictionary contains more than 42,000 words” limits the topic too much. There is nothing else for the writer to say, so the paragraph cannot continue.

ACTIVITY 3 | Recognizing controlling ideas in topic sentences

Read each topic sentence. The topic is circled. Underline the controlling idea. What information do you expect to find in the paragraph? Share your answers with a partner.

WORDS TO KNOW Activity 3

addictive: (adj) having qualities that make you want to do something again and again

advantage: (n) a good or desirable quality or feature

confuse: (v) to mix up mentally so one cannot understand

educational: (adj) describes something that teaches or involves learning

investigator: (n) a person who tries to learn how something happened

- 1. The new test has three sections dealing with three important skills.
Expectation:
- 2. The shocking crash of the airplane off the coast of Florida confused investigators.
Expectation:

- 3. Crossword puzzles are not only educational and fun, but also addictive.
Expectation:
- 4. Recent research has shown once again that eating dark green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli and cabbage may reduce the risk of some types of cancer.
Expectation:
- 5. Although buying a house may seem like a good idea, renting an apartment has many advantages.
Expectation:

ACTIVITY 4 | Recognizing good topic sentences and controlling ideas

Read the three sentences. Check (✓) the best topic sentence. Underline the controlling idea in that sentence. Be prepared to explain your selections.

WORDS TO KNOW Activity 4

contribution: (n) what someone does to help make something successful

immigrant: (n) someone who comes to live in a different country

recognize: (v) to give attention or notice to

- 1. In an English class, most of the female students receive higher grades than the males.
Research has shown female students like learning languages more than males do.
Many students like languages very much.
- 2. Cats are better pets than goldfish for many reasons.
Cats and goldfish are both animals.
Cats cannot swim very well, but goldfish can.
- 3. The people in my office eat lunch from 11:30 to 12:30.
Yesterday I went to work late, and my boss was of course very angry.
Yesterday was the worst day of my life.

4.

_____ Paul Cézanne was born in France in the last century.

_____ Paul Cézanne, the father of modern art, made important **contributions** to the history of art.

_____ Many of the museum visitors **recognized** Paul Cézanne's work immediately.
5.

_____ Many Canadians speak French, and some of them speak Chinese.

_____ The current population of Canada includes **immigrants** from all over the world.

_____ A large number of new immigrants live in British Columbia, Canada, but not many of them speak German.

ACTIVITY 5 | Adding controlling ideas

These topic sentences are too general. Using the same topic, write a topic sentence with a clear controlling idea. Then compare your sentences with a partner’s.

1.

Flowers are beautiful.

Flowers are the best gift to receive when you are feeling down.

OR Only four kinds of flowers grow during the short summers in Alaska.
2.

Cats are nice.
3.

Paris is the capital of France.
4.

Reading blogs is interesting.
5.

Running is a hobby.

ACTIVITY 6 | Studying the controlling idea of a paragraph

Answer the questions.

1.

Write the topic sentence from Paragraph 3.1 here.
2.

Underline the controlling idea(s) in that topic sentence.
3.

How is the controlling idea connected to the information in the paragraph?

ACTIVITY 7 | Writing topic sentences in paragraphs

Read the paragraphs and write a topic sentence for each. Be sure to indent the first line.

WORDS TO KNOW

Paragraphs 3.2 to 3.4

connection:

(n) an association

control:

(v) to manage

culture:

(n) the beliefs and actions of a group

depend (on):

(v) to need

effective:

(adj) useful

imagine:

(v) to make a picture in your head

in sum:

(connector) in conclusion

PARAGRAPH 3.2

Reasons for Playing Instruments

Some people learn to play a musical instrument because they want to have fun. They want to play it with their friends or maybe in a band. Other people learn to play an instrument because it is part of their **culture**. Certain instruments are popular in some cultures, such as the guitar in Spain or the oud¹ in the Middle East. Sometimes, people even learn to play an instrument because they think it will make them smarter. They want to keep their mind busy, and music is different from the work they think about all day long. **In sum**, there is clearly not just one main reason that people play a musical instrument.

¹oud: a stringed instrument that is popular in the Middle East

PARAGRAPH 3.3

Differences between Modern Reptiles and Dinosaurs

One is size. Most modern reptiles are small. Dinosaurs were much larger than any reptile on Earth now. Second, the legs of most reptiles today are on the sides of their body. However, dinosaurs’ legs were on the bottom of their body. In this way, dinosaurs could stand up on their back legs. Third, today’s reptiles use the environment to **control** their body temperature. In contrast, dinosaurs controlled their own body temperature. They did not **depend on** what was around them. While reptiles and dinosaurs may seem very similar, they are actually very different.

A saltwater crocodile, the world’s largest reptile





A hatchet

PARAGRAPH 3.4

A Method for Learning New Words

In the Keyword Method, language learners make a **connection** between the sound of the word they are trying to learn and a word in their first language. For example, a Japanese learner of English might connect the English word *hatchet* with the Japanese word *hachi*, which means “eight,” because the two words have a similar sound. In the second step, learners make a picture in their heads to help them remember the word. In this case, the learner might **imagine** a person using a hatchet to cut down eight trees. For many language learners, the Keyword Method is **effective**.

Grammar: Complex Sentences

Three kinds of sentences are important for your writing: *simple*, *compound*, and *complex*.

- a **simple sentence** has one independent clause. An **independent clause** has one subject-verb relationship, and it can stand alone as a sentence.
People from many different cultures **live** in Los Angeles.
- a **compound sentence** has two independent clauses that can stand alone. The two clauses are connected with words such as *and*, *but*, *so*.
The weather there **is** hot, and **it** often **rains**.
- a **complex sentence** has one independent clause and one dependent clause Each clause has a subject-verb relationship. A **dependent clause** cannot stand alone. Here are two common types of dependent clauses.

| TYPE OF DEPENDENT CLAUSE | EXAMPLES OF COMPLEX SENTENCES |
|---|--|
| An adjective clause gives more information about a noun it follows. It begins with a <u>relative pronoun</u> (<i>who/whom, that, or which</i>). | People <u>who exercise regularly</u> are healthier. Dictionaries <u>that have two languages</u> are useful. |
| An adverb clause begins with a <u>connecting word</u> , such as <i>because</i> (reason); <i>before, after, when</i> (time); <i>if</i> (condition); <i>although</i> (contrast). | They play the guitar <u>because they enjoy it</u> . <u>Before they start working</u> , they check email. |

ACTIVITY 8 | Identifying types of sentences

Identify each sentence. Write *simple*, *compound*, or *complex*. Be ready to explain your answers.

- _____ When I walked into the room, I was very nervous.
- _____ Beijing has many famous tourist attractions, such as the Imperial Palace, Tian’anmen Square, and the Lama Temple.
- _____ Central Park has a zoo and many other interesting places to visit, but sometimes it is too cold to visit in the winter.
- _____ A good writer learns to create longer, more detailed sentences from simple ideas.
- _____ Some families do not have the extra time that pets require.
- _____ Although Bolívar’s name is not as well-known outside Latin America, many people there consider him the most important historical person.
- _____ Brazil and Chile are near each other, but these two South American countries are very different in geography, population, and language.
- _____ Like most countries in South America, the majority of people in Chile speak Spanish.
- _____ Before e-readers were invented, students had to carry several heavy books with them each day.
- _____ E-readers are wireless, so students can carry them anywhere.

ACTIVITY 9 | Identifying types of complex sentences

Underline the dependent clause in each sentence. Write *Adj* if it is an adjective clause or *Adv* if it is an adverb clause.

- _____ People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.
- _____ If your photocopies cost 21 cents, your change should be four cents.
- _____ Gumbo is a thick soup that is made with shrimp and vegetables.
- _____ Bush became president after Clinton was president for eight years.
- _____ The season that many young children enjoy a lot is summer.
- _____ Because they do not go to school in summer, children often like summer more than other seasons.
- _____ Most people become angry when their computer freezes.
- _____ In class, we discussed problems that were common in the 1990s.

Mechanics: Commas

Commas are very important in writing because they help the reader understand the writer’s message more easily.

| EXPLANATION | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|
| Lists: A comma shows that a list has three or more things. We do not use a comma with two things. We use <i>and</i> instead of a comma. | I speak English, Spanish, and Japanese. I speak English and Spanish. |
| Compound sentences: A comma separates two independent clauses when there is a coordinating conjunction, such as <i>and</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>so</i> , or <i>or</i> . | I speak three languages, but Adam speaks five. |
| Introductory words or phrases: A comma separates the subject from: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ prepositional phrases (<i>In the winter of 1995</i>, . . .)▪ sequence words (<i>first</i>, <i>next</i>, <i>finally</i>)▪ transition words or phrases (<i>However</i>, <i>Therefore</i>, <i>In addition</i>) | Last summer , the beach lost a lot of sand. First , you will need to get a pencil. Therefore , we will not complete the project. |
| Adverb clauses: When the adverb clause is at the beginning of a sentence, use a comma after it. Do not use a comma if the adverb clause is at the end of a sentence. | Because I speak three languages , I can communicate with many people. I can communicate with many people because I speak three languages . |

Note: For more information on commas, see Capitalization and Punctuation" in the *Writers Handbook*.

ACTIVITY 10 | Comma practice in sentences

Insert commas where necessary. Write the number of the comma rule/(s) (1, 2, 3, 4) on the line. Sometimes more than one rule is possible.

1. 2 Brazil is surrounded by Spanish-speaking countries, but most people in Brazil speak Portuguese.
2. The flags of Chile France and Norway have blue white and red sections.
3. Fortunately no one was hurt in the accident that happened yesterday.
4. Italian French Spanish and Portuguese came from Latin.
5. My friend has an e-reader and she convinced me to buy one.
6. In the summer of 1940 German soldiers entered France.
7. Because English came from German there are many similar words in the two languages.
8. If you want to make cookies you need flour sugar oil and vanilla.

ACTIVITY 11 | Comma practice in a paragraph

Insert six commas in the paragraph where necessary. Be prepared to explain your choices. Some sentences are correct with no commas.

WORDS TO KNOW Paragraph 3.5

economy: (n) the production of a placetherefore: (connector) as a result

PARAGRAPH 3.5

Malaysia and Thailand

Because Malaysia and Thailand are next to each other we might think that these two countries share many similarities. In some ways, this is true. For example both countries are warm all year long. Both have many miles of beautiful beaches that attract tourists. In addition the **economy** of both countries is growing. However there are also several clear differences. For one, Malaysians and Thais speak completely different languages. The population of Malaysia is about 31 million while the population of Thailand is about 69 million. Thailand has a king, but Malaysia does not. Finally, Malaysia was part of Britain at one time but Thailand was never British. **Therefore** the fact that two countries are near each other does not always mean that they are similar.



BUILDING BETTER VOCABULARY

WORDS TO KNOW

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| addictive (adj) | culture (n) AW | improve (v) |
| advantage (n) | depend (on) (v) | in good shape (idiom) |
| climb (v) | economy (n) AW | in sum (connector) AW |
| confuse (v) | educational (adj) | investigator (n) AW |
| connection (n) | effective (adj) | recognize (v) |
| contribution (n) AW | imagine (v) | reduce (v) |
| control (v) | immigrant (n) AW | therefore (connector) |

ACTIVITY 12 | Word associations

Circle the word or phrase that is more closely related to the bold word on the left.

| | | |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1. climb | go down | go up |
| 2. confuse | get it right | make a mistake |
| 3. depend | need | try |
| 4. economy | food | money |
| 5. effective | useful | useless |
| 6. imagine | speak | think |
| 7. improve | better | worse |
| 8. in sum | long | short |
| 9. recognize | know | not know |
| 10. therefore | but | so |

ACTIVITY 13 | Collocations

Fill in the blank with the word that most naturally completes the phrase.

| | | | | |
|-------|--------------|-----------|--------|-----|
| climb | contribution | effective | reduce | sum |
|-------|--------------|-----------|--------|-----|

1. _____ waste
2. a _____ to science
3. _____ a tree
4. a very _____ leader
5. in _____

| | | | | |
|-----------|------------|---------|--------|---------|
| advantage | connection | culture | depend | imagine |
|-----------|------------|---------|--------|---------|

6. to have an _____
7. a _____ between two things
8. _____ on your parents for a place to live
9. _____ being in a car with no driver
10. normal in my _____

ACTIVITY 14 | Word forms

Complete each sentence with the correct word form. Use the correct forms of the words.

| NOUN | VERB | ADJECTIVE | ADVERB | SENTENCES |
|-------------|---------|-----------|-------------|--|
| connection | connect | connected | | 1. A conjunction such as <i>and</i> _____ two clauses. 2. After you have _____ the wire to the TV, it should work. 3. Argentina and Mexico share a historical _____. |
| culture | | cultural | culturally | 4. Argentina and Mexico may share a language, but they differ _____. 5. Many different _____ exist around the globe. |
| dependence | depend | dependent | | 6. Success in school _____ on many people. |
| effect | | effective | effectively | 7. One _____ of the new law is that teachers' salaries will not increase. 8. What are _____ strategies for learning new vocabulary? |
| imagination | imagine | imaginary | | 9. In winter, I _____. I am in a warmer place. 10. Experienced teachers encourage students to use their _____. |

ACTIVITY 15 | Vocabulary in writing

Choose five words from Words to Know. Write a complete sentence with each word. Use *because, if, before, after, when, while, or although* in two of your sentences. Remember to use commas correctly.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

BUILDING BETTER SENTENCES

ACTIVITY 16 | Editing

Each sentence has (x) number of errors. Find and correct them.

1. Although some politicians in this country believes that the new law will make a difference in electricity costs most people think there will be no change. (2)
2. In the sum, gasoline prices will continue to rise each year, because companies want make more money on gasoline sales. (3)
3. Although some teachers retire when they are 55 year old the normal retirement age for a teacher in U.K. is 60. (3)
4. Brazil ranks fifth in population and it is the fifth most big country in the world. (2)
5. According to the article people thought their dinner tasted better, when they did not use social media. (2)
6. When a airplane take off the pilot and other crew are very busy. (3)

ACTIVITY 17 | Writing sentences

Write an original sentence using the words listed. You may change the form of the nouns (singular/plural) and verbs (tenses).

1. (politician / years)

One of the local politicians has been in office for 18 years.
2. (a new car / because)
3. (if / cancel)
4. (famous / France)
5. (average / price)
6. (one / most difficult)

ACTIVITY 18 | Combining sentences

Combine the ideas into one sentence. You may change the word forms, but do not change or omit any ideas. There may be more than one answer.

1. A condition requires attention.
The condition is a medical condition.
The condition is serious.
The attention is immediate.
2. Canada is a country.
Canada is large.
The population of Canada is very small.

3. The assignment is to write a paper.
The assignment is the last one.
The assignment is for our history class.
The class is British History.
The paper should explain how the War of 1812 started.

WRITING

ACTIVITY 19 | Brainstorming ideas for a paragraph

Choose one of these topics. Brainstorm ideas about it and write your ideas in a list or on a diagram. When you have finished, circle the ideas that you think are best to include in a paragraph.

- animal communication
- international flights
- learning a language
- smartphones

ACTIVITY 20 | Writing a paragraph

Use your brainstorming notes from Activity 19 to write a paragraph. Follow these guidelines.

1. Begin your paragraph with a topic sentence that has a clear controlling idea.
2. Use at least two of the vocabulary words or phrases presented in Words to Know.
3. Make sure that your paragraph has the four features as outlined in Unit 1.



Elephants touching, to greet each other, Addo Elephant National Park, South Africa

ACTIVITY 21 | Peer editing

Work with a partner. Read your partner’s paragraph from Activity 20. Use Peer Editing Form 3 in the *Writer’s Handbook*. Offer positive suggestions to help your partner write a better paragraph. Consider your partner’s comments as you revise your paragraph.

Additional Topics for Writing

Here are more ideas for writing a paragraph. When you write your paragraph, follow the guidelines for Activity 20.

- TOPIC 1: Look at the photo at the beginning of the unit. Write about a childhood memory of playing outside. Who were you with? How did you feel?
- TOPIC 2: Write about your daily routine. What do you do, and when? How many things do you do in a day? What is the best part of your day or week?
- TOPIC 3: Write about a famous person you would like to meet. What has this person done that is interesting to you? What would you talk about? What would you hope to learn from the experience?
- TOPIC 4: Write about two vacation destinations. Which is better? Compare the sights. What is similar, and what is different? What are some activities you can do while in each of these places?
- TOPIC 5: Write about your favorite relative. Who is this person? What qualities make this person special? How does this person make others feel?

TEST PREP

You should spend about 25 minutes on this task. Write about the following topic:

In your opinion, why do so many people want to learn English?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your knowledge or experience. Remember to include a topic sentence with a controlling idea. Write at least 150 words.

TIP

Be sure that your topic sentence has a logical controlling idea. Remember that your topic sentence guides your paragraph. If the topic sentence is not clear, the reader will have difficulty following your supporting ideas.