

EXERCISES ON PARAGRAPH WRITING

A) TOPIC SENTENCES

The topic sentence is the most important sentence of a paragraph. It states the main idea and introduces the reader to the topic.

1. CHOOSING TOPIC SENTENCES

Choose the best topic sentence for each group of supporting sentences. Write it on the line provided.

Example: _____ b _____. I usually go skiing every weekend in the winter even though it is expensive. I love the feeling of flying down a mountain. The views are beautiful from the top of a mountain and along the trails. Even the danger of falling and getting hurt can't keep me away from the slopes on a winter day.

- a) Skiing is expensive.
- b) Skiing is my favourite sport.
- c) Skiing is dangerous.

1.) _____. North Americans send cards for many occasions. They send cards to family and friends on birthdays and holidays. They also send thank-you cards, get well cards, graduation cards, and congratulation cards. It is very common to buy cards in stores and send them through the mail, but turning on the computer and sending cards over the Internet is also popular.

- a) Sending cards is very popular in North America.
- b) Birthday cards are the most popular kind of card.
- c) It is important to send thank-you cards.

- 2.) _____. I enjoy summer sports like water skiing and baseball. The weather is usually sunny and hot, so I can go to the beach almost every day. Gardening is my hobby and I spend many summer days working in my garden. Unfortunately, the days pass too quickly in summer.
- a) I like to garden in summer.
 - b) Summer is my favourite season.
 - c) Summer is too short.
- 3.) _____. First of all, we need money to repair old roads and build new roads. We also need more to pay teachers' salaries and to pay for services such as trash collection. Finally, more tax money is needed to give financial help to the poor citizens of the city. It is clear that the city will have serious problems if taxes are not raised soon.
- a) We should raise city taxes.
 - b) City taxes are too high.
 - c) City taxes pay for new roads.
- 4.) _____. For example, a person can have breakfast in New York, board an airplane, and have dinner in Paris. A businesswoman in London can instantly place an order with a factory in Hong Kong by sending a fax. Furthermore, a schoolboy in Tokyo can turn on a TV and watch a baseball game being played in Los Angeles.
- a) Airplanes have changed our lives.
 - b) Advances in technology have made the world seem smaller.
 - c) The fax machine was an important invention.
- 5.) _____. One thing you must consider is the quality of the university's educational program. You also need to think about the school's size and location. Finally, you must be sure to consider the university's tuition to make sure you can afford to go to school there.
- a) It is expensive to attend a university in the United States.
 - b) There are several factors to consider when you choose a university to attend.
 - c) You should consider getting a good education.

2. WRITING A TOPIC SENTENCE

Write a topic sentence for each paragraph. Make sure your topic sentence expresses the main idea of the paragraph.

Example: Miami is the perfect place to take a vacation. It is always sunny and warm. The beaches are gorgeous, with soft white sand and beautiful water. There are many fine restaurants in the Miami area, and most of the hotels offer terrific entertainment nightly. It's no wonder that Miami is my first choice for a vacation destination.

- 1.) _____. He has collected stamps and coins ever since he was a child. He is very proud of his valuable collections. Paul also enjoys painting and drawing. Recently he has become interested in gardening. Out of all his hobbies, Paul's favourite one is reading. He usually reads at least one book every week. Paul keeps busy with all of his hobbies.
- 2.) _____. I can't wait to come home from school and eat the delicious meals she has prepared. She is famous for her desserts like peach pie and chocolate soufflé. She is always experimenting with new recipes and trying different ingredients. No one in the world can cook the way my mother does.
- 3.) _____. It never starts in cold weather. The horn and the left turn signal don't work properly. Worst of all, the radio only gets one station and the CD player is completely broken. I wish I could get a new car.
- 4.) _____. First and most importantly, the work is very interesting. I learn new things every day and I get to travel a lot. In addition, my boss is very nice. She is always willing to help me when I have a problem. I have also made many new friends at my job. Last, but not least, the salary is fantastic.
- 5.) _____. To start things off, my plane was six hours late. When I finally got to my hotel, I was very disappointed. It was small and dirty. On the third day, my wallet was

stolen, and I lost all my credit cards. It rained every day except one, and on that day I got a terrible sunburn. All in all, it wasn't a vacation to remember.

B) SUPPORTING SENTENCES

The supporting sentences develop the main idea in the topic sentence. They add details to the topic.

3. RECOGNIZING SUPPORTING SENTENCES

Read the following paragraphs and underline the supporting sentences.

1.) Use of the internet has grown very quickly. In 1983, there were 562 computers connected to the Internet. By the turn of the century, there were 72.3 million computers in 247 countries on-line. Experts say that the Internet is now growing at a rate of approximately 40 percent a year. As time goes on, the Internet is becoming more and more popular.

2.) There are many reasons I hate my apartment. The plumbing doesn't work properly and the landlord refuses to fix it. I also have noisy neighbours who keep me up all night. Furthermore, there are so many bugs in my apartment that I could start an insect collection. I really want to move.

3.) Vegetables and fruits are an important part of a healthy diet. First, fruits and vegetables are packed with the vitamins and minerals you need to keep your body functioning smoothly. In addition, they give you the carbohydrates you need for energy. Fruits and vegetables have lots of fiber to help your digestive system work properly. Finally, many scientists believe that the nutrients in fruits and vegetables can help fight diseases. If you eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, you'll be on the road to better health.

C) IRRELEVANT SENTENCES

Every supporting sentence in a paragraph must relate to the main idea stated in the topic sentence. A sentence that does not support the main idea does not belong in the paragraph, thus such a sentence should be omitted. When a sentence does not belong in a paragraph, it is called an **irrelevant sentence**.

Example: The students in the class come from many different parts of the world. Some are from European countries, such as France, Spain, and Italy. Others are from Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel. Still other students were born in Asian countries, including Japan and Korea. **Korean food is delicious.** The largest number of students is from Latin American countries like Mexico, Venezuela and Peru. The class is an interesting mix of people from many different countries.

4. RECOGNIZING IRRELEVANT SENTENCES

There is one irrelevant sentence in each paragraph that follows. Find that sentence and cross it out.

- 1.) There are several ways people can conserve natural resources. One way is to turn lights off and appliances when they are not in use. Another way is to drive cars less. My favourite kind of car is convertible. People can also insulate their houses better. Finally, by reusing things like bottles and plastic bags, people can reduce the amount of waste. By practicing these simple guidelines, we can save our natural resources.
- 2.) Cats make wonderful house pets. They are very loving and friendly. Cats are also clean. They don't eat much, so they are not expensive. Unfortunately, some people are allergic to their hair. Cats look beautiful and they're fun to have in your home.
- 3.) The capital city of a country is usually a very important city. The government offices are located in the capital city and political leaders usually live there nearby. There are many different types of governments in the world. The capital may also be the centre of culture. There are often museums, libraries, and universities in the capital. Finally, the capital city can serve as a centre of trade, industry and commerce, so it is often the financial centre of the country.

- 4.) The Japanese automobile industry uses robots in many stages of its production process. In fact, one large Japanese auto factory uses robots in all of its production stages. Some Japanese universities are developing medical robots to detect certain kinds of cancer. Another automobile factory in Japan uses them to paint cars as they come off the assembly line. Furthermore, most Japanese factories use robots to weld the parts of the finished car together.
- 5.) The packaging of many products is very wasteful. Often the packaging is twice as big as the product. Packaging is used to protect things that are breakable. Many food items, for example, have several layers of extra packaging. Most of these extra layers could be eliminated.

D) CONCLUDING SENTENCES

Some paragraphs end with a concluding sentence. This sentence states the main idea of the paragraph again using different words. It summarizes the main points of the paragraph, or makes a final comment on the topic.

Concluding sentences are not always necessary. In fact, short paragraphs that are part of longer pieces of writing often do not have concluding sentences.

5. WRITING CONCLUDING SENTENCES

Write a concluding sentence for each paragraph.

1.) There are many reasons why I like wearing a uniform to school. First of all, it saves time. I don't have to spend time picking out my clothes every morning. Wearing a uniform also saves money. It's cheaper to purchase a new uniform than to go out and buy lots of school clothes. In addition, I don't have the pressure of keeping up with the latest styles. Most importantly, wearing a school uniform gives me a sense that I belong. I really think that it adds to the feeling of school spirit and community. _____ .

2.) There are many reasons why I am against wearing a school uniform. For one thing, I don't like the style of the uniform. The navy blazer and plaid skirt are too conservative for me. Secondly, the uniform isn't comfortable. I prefer to wear baggy pants and a sweater instead of a skirt and a jacket. Finally, I want the freedom to express my individuality through my style of dressing.

3.) Credit cards have a lot of advantages. First of all, credit cards are convenient because you don't have to carry a lot of cash around. You can buy the products and services you need even if you do not have cash in your pocket. In addition, credit cards are very helpful in emergencies. Finally, you can become a better money manager as you learn to use credit cards responsibly.

THE KEY:

1. **CHOOSING TOPIC SENTENCES: 1a, 2b, 3a, 4 b 5 b.**
2. **WRITING A TOPIC SENTENCE:**

Suggested answers:

- 1.) **Paul has many hobbies.** (Instead of 'many' you can use: a lot of, several)
- 2.) **My mother is great cook.** (Instead of 'great' you can use similar adjectives: very good, fantastic) , also: My mother's cooking is very good.
- 3.) **I have (got) problems with my car.** Also: I have difficulties / troubles with my car.
- 4.) **I have (got) a great job.** (Also: I have (got) a fantastic / perfect / a very good job.
- 5.) **My holidays / vacations were a disaster.** (Also: My vacations / holidays were disastrous / terrible.)

3. RECOGNIZING SUPPORTING SENTENCES

- 1.) Use of the internet has grown very quickly. In 1983, there were 562 computers connected to the Internet. By the turn of the century, there were 72.3 million computers in 247 countries on-line. Experts say that the Internet is now growing at a rate of approximately 40 percent a year. As time goes on, the Internet is becoming more and more popular.
2. There are many reasons I hate my apartment. The plumbing doesn't work properly and the landlord refuses to fix it. I also have noisy neighbours who keep me up all night. Furthermore, there are so many bugs in my apartment that I could start an insect collection. I really want to move.
- 3.) Vegetables and fruits are an important part of a healthy diet. First, fruits and vegetables are packed with the vitamins and minerals you need to keep your body functioning smoothly. In addition, they give you the carbohydrates you need for energy. Fruits and vegetables have lots of fiber to help your digestive system work properly. Finally, many scientists believe that the nutrients in fruits and vegetables

can help fight diseases. If you eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, you'll be on the road to better health.

4. RECOGNIZING IRRELEVANT SENTENCES

- 1.) My favourite kind of car is convertible.
- 2.) Unfortunately, some people are allergic to their hair.
- 3.) There are many different types of governments in the world.
- 4.) Some Japanese universities are developing medical robots to detect certain kinds of cancer.
- 5.) Packaging is used to protect things that are breakable.

6. WRITING CONCLUDING SENTENCES

Suggested answers:

- 1.) I am happy that we have to wear a uniform to school. (Answers can vary.)
- 2.) I am not keen on wearing a uniform to school. / I don't like to wear a uniform to school. / I am not fond of wearing a uniform to school. (Answers can vary.)
- 3.) Credit cards are my favourite means of payment. / Credit cards are the best means of payment. (Answers can vary.)

Source: Blanchard, K. in Root, C. 2003. Ready to Write. NY: Pearson Education - Longman.