The concluding sentence signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember:

In conclusion, gold is treasured not only for its beauty but also for its utility.

Concluding sentences are customary for stand-alone paragraphs. However, paragraphs that are parts of a longer piece of writing usually do not need concluding sentences.

The Topic Sentence

Every good paragraph has a topic sentence, which clearly states the topic and the controlling idea of the paragraph.

A topic sentence is the most important sentence in a paragraph. It briefly indicates what the paragraph is going to discuss. For this reason, the topic sentence is a helpful guide to both the writer and the reader. The writer can see what information to include (and what information to exclude). The reader can see what the paragraph is going to be about and is therefore better prepared to understand it. For example, in the model paragraph on gold, the topic sentence alerts the reader to look for two characteristics.

Here are three important points to remember about a topic sentence.

1. A topic sentence is a complete sentence; that is, it contains at least one subject and one verb. The following are not complete sentences because they do not have verbs:

   Driving on freeways.
   How to register for college classes.
   The rise of indie films.

2. A topic sentence contains both a topic and a controlling idea. It names the topic and then limits the topic to a specific area to be discussed in the space of a single paragraph.

   Driving on freeways requires skill and alertness.
   Registering for college classes can be a frustrating experience for new students.
   The rise of indie films is due to several factors.

1 *Indie films:* independent films; films not made in or by Hollywood studios
3. A topic sentence is the most general statement in the paragraph because it gives only the main idea. It does not give any specific details. A topic sentence is like the name of a particular course on a restaurant menu. When you order food in a restaurant, you want to know more about a particular course than just “meat” or “soup” or “salad.” You want to know generally what kind of salad it is. Potato salad? Mixed green salad? Fruit salad? However, you do not necessarily want to know all the ingredients. Similarly, a reader wants to know generally what to expect in a paragraph, but he or she does not want to learn all the details in the first sentence.

Following is a general statement that could serve as a topic sentence.

The Arabic origin of many English words is not always obvious.

The following sentence on the other hand, is too specific. It could serve as a supporting sentence but not as a topic sentence.

The slang expression so long (meaning “good-bye”) is probably a corruption of the Arabic salaam.

This sentence is too general.

English has been influenced by other languages.

Position of Topic Sentences

The topic sentence is usually (but not always) the first sentence in a paragraph. Experienced writers sometimes put topic sentences in other locations, but the best spot is usually right at the beginning. Readers who are used to the English way of writing want to know what they will read about as soon as they begin reading.

Synonyms

Synonyms, words that have the same basic meaning, do not always have the same emotional meaning. For example, the words stingy and frugal both mean “careful with money.” However, calling someone stingy is an insult, but calling someone frugal is a compliment. Similarly, a person wants to be slender but not skinny, aggressive but not pushy. Therefore, you should be careful in choosing words because many so-called synonyms are not really synonymous at all.

Sometimes a topic sentence comes at the end. In this case, the paragraph often begins with a series of examples. Other paragraphs may begin with a series of facts, and the topic sentence at the end is the conclusion from these facts.
Medical Miracles to Come

By the year 2009, a vaccine\(^1\) against the common cold will have been developed. By the same year, the first human will have been successfully cloned.\(^2\) By the year 2014, parents will be able to create designer children. Genetic therapy will be able to manipulate genes for abilities, intelligence, and hair, eye, and skin color. By 2020, most diseases will be able to be diagnosed and treated at home, and by 2030, cancer and heart disease will have been wiped out. These are just a few examples of the medical miracles that are expected in the next few decades.

PRACTICE 1

Recognizing Topic Sentences

A. Remember that a topic sentence is a complete sentence and is neither too general nor too specific.

Step 1 Read the sentences in each group, and decide which sentence is the best topic sentence. Write best TS (for “best topic sentence”) on the line next to it.

Step 2 Decide what is wrong with the other sentences. They may be too general, or they may be too specific, or they may be incomplete sentences. Write too general, too specific, or incomplete on the lines next to them.

The first one has been done for you as an example.

Group 1

too specific a. A lunar eclipse is an omen of a coming disaster.
too general b. Superstitions have been around forever.
best TS c. People hold many superstitious beliefs about the moon.
incomplete d. Is made of green cheese.

Group 2

___________ a. The history of astronomy is interesting.
___________ b. Ice age people recorded the appearance of new moons by making scratches in animal bones.
___________ c. For example, Stonehenge in Britain, built 3500 years ago to track the movement of the sun.
___________ d. Ancient people observed and recorded lunar and solar events in different ways.

\(^1\)vaccine: medicine that prevents a specific disease such as polio

\(^2\)cloned: made an exact copy of