

## Topic Sentence Explanation

A paragraph is a group of related sentences that discuss one main idea. Often a paragraph has 5-8 sentences, but that is not a rule—*often* that is the case. All paragraphs, however, must have a topic sentence and supporting sentences. Let's look in detail at the topic sentence today.

A topic sentence is the most important sentence in a paragraph. It briefly indicates what the writer is going to discuss, and thus it is helpful for both the writer (who can see what information to include) and for the reader (who can see what the paragraph is about and therefore be better prepared to understand it).

Please remember three important points about topic sentences:

1. A topic sentence is a **complete sentence** (S-V, S-V-O, etc.).
2. A topic sentence usually **contains both a topic and a controlling idea**. It names the topic and then limits it to a specific part (one idea) which can be discussed in one paragraph. For example:

- (a) Driving on freeways requires skill and alertness.
- (b) Registering for university classes can be a difficult and frustrating experience for new students.
- (c) The increase in the number of independent films is due to several factors.

In these three sentences, let's mark the topic and the controlling idea.

- (a) *Driving on freeways requires skill and alertness.*

The topic is driving on freeways [高速公路], which is a very large area that could talk about such things as roads, cars, gasoline prices, speed limits, policemen, scenery, the US, and Japan,

Driving on freeways requires skill and alertness.

Next, the controlling idea takes us from that very large group to a smaller part than can be discussed in one paragraph. Here, the controlling idea is skill and alertness.

Driving on freeways requires skill and alertness.

topic

controlling idea

- (b) *Registering for university classes can be a difficult and frustrating experience for new students.*

For sentence (b), we would find...

topic  
Registering for university classes can be a difficult and frustrating experience for new students.  
controlling idea

For sentence (c), these would be...

topic controlling idea  
(c) The increase in the number of independent films is due to several factors.

3. A topic sentence is the **most general statement** in the paragraph because it gives only the main idea. Don't write specific details here. For example...

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

Sentence (a) is a good topic sentence.

(b) The slang expression *so long* (meaning 'good-bye') is probably a corruption of the Arabic word *salaam*.

Sentence (b) is too specific—it has a specific example.

(c) English has been influenced by other languages.

Sentence (c) is too general.