

Main Idea and Topic Sentence

Writers often group their sentences in paragraphs. All the sentences in a paragraph should work together to tell about one idea, called the **main idea**. Often, the main idea is stated in a **topic sentence**. A topic sentence that begins a paragraph introduces the main idea to readers. A topic sentence at the middle or end of a paragraph usually summarizes or restates the main idea.

Developing Paragraphs with Supporting Sentences

Sentences that tell more about the main idea are called **supporting sentences**. Each writer chooses his or her own way to develop a main idea with supporting sentences. In some paragraphs, writers use supporting sentences to describe *sensory details* about how a person or thing looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels. In other paragraphs, they use supporting sentences that give *examples, facts and figures, or reasons* to develop the main idea.

Sequence

When writing about events or describing step-by-step processes, it often makes sense to present details in **time order**. Sometimes, the writer uses key words such as *first, second, next, then, after that, finally, and last* to make the order of events clear to readers. At other times, the writer simply describes events one after the other in the order they happen, without using key words.

Unrelated Sentences

Every paragraph has a main idea, whether it is stated in a topic sentence or not. All the sentences in a paragraph should relate to the main idea. Writers have a responsibility to write and then edit their work carefully, removing any sentence that does not directly develop the paragraph's main idea.

Read each paragraph. Choose the sentence that best fills the blank.

1. _____ . First, the builders cut blocks of hard snow about three feet by one and one-half feet. Then they place the blocks in a big circle. Layer by layer, they position the blocks closer together until, at last, they meet in a dome in the middle. Two holes are cut: one on the side, for the door, and another in the roof, to serve as a vent. Finally, the igloo is ready to be lived in.
 - A Inuit people rarely construct igloos anymore.
 - B It would be uncomfortable to live in an igloo.
 - C Constructing an igloo is a painstaking process.
 - D Snow blocks have excellent insulating qualities.

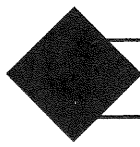
2. _____ . During the first stage, your brain is still quite active from your day. You may focus on one idea after the other in quick succession. In the second phase, you experience light sleep. The third stage is a quiet sleep, which prepares you for the fourth stage, a deep sleep. These stages are repeated and reversed throughout the night.
 - F Sleep is important for your health.
 - G Without sleep, people cannot concentrate during the day.
 - H Most people need eight hours of sleep every night.
 - J A typical sleep cycle has four stages.

3. Trish recorded minutes at the committee meeting. _____. Then she proofread what she had typed. She printed one copy of the report and then ran off twenty copies, one for each committee member. Last, she placed a copy in each committee member's mailbox.
 - A Next, she stood in line to use the copying machine.
 - B Afterwards, she typed up a draft of the minutes on her computer.
 - C Then she e-mailed a copy to the committee chairperson.
 - D She brought her notebook and a pen into the meeting room.

Assessment *continued*

Read each topic sentence. Then choose the answer that best develops the topic sentence.

4. People around the world build their homes using materials that are easily available.
- F Architects study for years to learn how to design public buildings and private homes. Usually an architect works with a contractor to build a home.
 - G Some of the materials used in the homes of the wealthy are quite expensive. The more expensive and rare a material is, the more it proves the owner's social position.
 - H Homes built near the San Andreas Fault must be strong enough to withstand an earthquake. No one knows when the predicted big earthquake will happen.
 - J The Navaho people built their homes, called hogans, using logs and earth from the land around them. The Inuit used snow blocks from their home in the frozen Arctic to build temporary homes called igloos.
5. All winter, Kris relived her hike up the mountain on that summer morning.
- A The Rocky Mountains are a young mountain range. The Appalachian Mountains, on the other hand, are quite old.
 - B Again, she felt the cool breeze against her skin. She heard the sweet songs of the birds. She saw the green mountain against the blue sky.
 - C She is planning next year's vacation now. She hopes to visit Hawaii or Alaska.
 - D It is always a wise idea to hike with a companion. If you have an accident, it's comforting to know that someone is there to help you.
6. Many Americans experienced terrible problems during the Great Depression.
- F The Depression began in 1929. That was the year of the stock market crash.
 - G At the beginning of the Great Depression, Herbert Hoover was president. Franklin Roosevelt became president in 1932.
 - H Some families lost all their money and their homes. Without any income, they were forced to stand in long lines just to get something to eat.
 - J People who lived through the Depression are careful with money. They know how easily it can disappear.



Assessment *continued*

Read each of the following paragraphs. Then choose the sentence that does not belong in the paragraph.

7. 1. The early Olympic Games lasted only five days. 2. On the first day, a huge parade was held. 3. Jim Thorpe of the United States won gold medals in the 1912 Olympics. 4. Competitions were held on the second, third, and fourth days. 5. A dinner to honor the winners took place on the fifth day.
- A Sentence 1
 - B Sentence 2
 - C Sentence 3
 - D Sentence 4
8. 1. Niagara Falls has attracted daredevils for decades. 2. A man called Blondin walked a tightrope above the Falls several times. 3. Many people have gone over the Falls in barrels. 4. Niagara Falls is beautiful at any time of the year.
- F Sentence 1
 - G Sentence 2
 - H Sentence 3
 - J Sentence 4
9. 1. Jean is determined to become a good cook. 2. Jean has always been just a few pounds overweight. 3. She subscribes to a magazine that is filled with cooking tips and techniques. 4. She has enrolled in a well-known cooking school.
- A Sentence 1
 - B Sentence 2
 - C Sentence 3
 - D Sentence 4
10. 1. In 1815, a volcano erupted in Asia. 2. Volcanic ash flew seventeen miles into the air. 3. The ashes blocked out sunlight as far away as the United States. 4. Mount Saint Helens is a famous volcano. 5. Because the ashes in the air kept temperatures low, Americans called 1815 the "year without a summer."
- F Sentence 2
 - G Sentence 3
 - H Sentence 4
 - J Sentence 5