

Finding the Topic Sentence

Many paragraphs include a topic sentence, which states the main idea. Often the topic sentence comes at the beginning of the paragraph. It directs readers and lets them know what they can expect from the paragraph.



It is not easy to become a taxi driver in London. To become licensed, cabbies have to pass a difficult exam. They must memorize all the basic driving routes. They must be able to locate every major building and tourist attraction. On average, a London cabbie trains for three years before getting a license.

The topic sentence does not always come at the beginning of the paragraph.

The city of Cuernavaca is located about an hour south of Mexico City. Those who live in Cuernavaca can easily travel to the capital for work or for weekend fun. The city itself has much to offer. It has beautiful architecture and a thriving nightlife. It is filled with flowers and trees. Its nickname is "The City of Eternal Spring." All in all, Cuernavaca is a great place to live.

Details about life in Cuernavaca are presented throughout this paragraph. At the end of the paragraph, the author summarizes the details in a topic sentence.

Underline the topic sentence in each of the following paragraphs.

1. The ancient Greeks believed that different gods controlled different parts of the weather. The sun god was Helios. The winds were controlled by the god Aeolus. Zeus was the ruler of the heavens. He controlled the clouds, rain, and thunder.
2. At the pageant, Miss Georgia had flowers woven into her braids. Miss Michigan had hair extensions all the way down to her knees. Miss Pennsylvania had cornrows with rubies at the ends. Miss Nevada had her hair in a towering red beehive. All of the contestants had imaginative hairstyles.
3. Good habits can help you study better. Pick a study spot with as few distractions as possible. Don't tempt yourself by studying in front of the TV. Set up all necessary items before you begin to study. If you don't have to keep getting up for pencils, notebooks, coffee, or other items, you can concentrate better. Give yourself a reward after a good study session.

B**Practice**

Read each paragraph. Then choose its topic sentence.

1. The Tour de France is a long and challenging bicycle race. The race takes place every summer over a three-week period. Some parts of the course are flat. Other parts go through mountains, requiring a great deal of strength and endurance. Usually the hot July sun adds stress on the teams of cyclists. By the time the competitors have completed the course from Luxembourg to Paris, they have cycled 2,036 miles!
 - A By the time the competitors have completed the course from Luxembourg to Paris, they have cycled 2,036 miles!
 - B The race takes place every summer over a three-week period.
 - C The Tour de France is a long and challenging bicycle race.

2. The Ford Motor Company has one car called the Mustang and another called the Bronco. Mercury has the Cougar. Dodge makes a truck and a van called the Ram. And, of course, there is a whole line of cars called Jaguars. Naming cars after powerful animals seems to be a popular practice.
 - F The Ford Motor Company has one car called the Mustang and another called the Bronco.
 - G Naming cars after powerful animals seems to be a popular practice.
 - H Dodge makes a truck and a van called the Ram.

3. The English countryside is known for its churches. In the town of Norwich alone there are 32 churches from the medieval period. The church at the abbey in Bath is a favorite of visitors. The Wells Cathedral, which is 800 years old, is believed to be the most beautiful church in Great Britain.
 - A The church at the abbey in Bath is a favorite of visitors.
 - B In the town of Norwich alone there are 32 churches from the medieval period.
 - C The English countryside is known for its churches.

4. Jim and Jack were twins, separated at birth. They were reunited at the age of 35 and discovered some strange similarities. Both Jim and Jack married women named Linda. Both had two sons. Both drove blue cars. They both liked woodworking and vacationed in Florida. Often, twins are amazingly alike.
 - F Often, twins are amazingly alike.
 - G Jim and Jack were twins, separated at birth.
 - H Both Jim and Jack married women named Linda.

C**Apply**

The topic sentence is missing in each of the following paragraphs. In its place is a short blank line. On the lines below each paragraph, write a topic sentence for the paragraph.

1. _____ . You can learn to speak Spanish, Italian, or Chinese with other adults. You can study music or history. Why not try a class in painting or photography taught by local artists? For those who want something more active, there are classes in tango and tap dancing.

2. One kind of monkey, the pygmy marmoset, is only about six inches long. The douroucouli monkey, when fully grown, measures about 19 inches. The woolly monkey can grow to a length of 23 inches. The mandrill, one of the largest monkeys, can reach a length of 32 inches. _____ .

3. _____ . Citizens of Portland, Oregon, jog and bicycle every day of the year. They also ski year-round on nearby Mount Hood. Western Oregon's rivers and coasts offer these folks all kinds of water sports. The area is so sports-minded that two major sports equipment companies have their headquarters there.

4. _____ . The clothes in Jake's closet are all neatly pressed and arranged. His bed is always made with military corners. His medicine cabinet is organized alphabetically. If you run your finger over any surface in his house, you'll never find a speck of dust.

D Check Up

Read each paragraph. Then choose its topic sentence.

1. _____. If you dream that you lose your wallet, it may be time to examine your sense of identity. If you lose your car in a dream, you might want to look at your need for independence. If you dream that you lose your keys, you may really be afraid of losing authority.
 - A We dream so that we are not bored while we sleep.
 - B Most people don't always remember their dreams.
 - C Dreams of lost objects may be trying to tell you something.
 - D For the last few night, my dreams have been very strange.

2. _____. One legend says that a goatherd named Kaldi noticed that his goats sometimes acted frisky. Later, he realized that the friskiness happened after the goats had nibbled at a certain shrub. He tasted some berries from the shrub himself. He felt filled with energy. That may be how humans began enjoying caffeine!
 - F Legend has it that goats are smarter than other animals.
 - G Legends can help us to understand animals such as goats.
 - H According to legend, you have goats to thank for your morning coffee.
 - J Goatherds always have milk in their coffee.

3. _____. For example, you may be so absorbed in a book that you miss your subway stop. Or you may be watching TV so closely that you feel like you're part of the action. Mild hypnosis even includes times when you're working so hard you don't realize how much time has passed.
 - A Hypnosis is an effective way to change your habits.
 - B You may experience mild forms of hypnosis in your daily life.
 - C Mild hypnosis is better than deep hypnosis.
 - D Once, the Amazing Millwort hypnotized a whole stadium full of people.

4. Have you ever heard Los Angeles called "City of Angels"? This nickname comes directly from translating its Spanish name into English. _____. "Tinseltown" alludes to the movie-star flashiness of the city. "Surf City" comes from the many surfers who use the city's beaches. A less kind nickname, "Hell Town," comes from the old Wild West days, when L.A. was known for being lawless.
 - F Los Angeles has many nicknames.
 - G Los Angeles boasts pleasant temperatures year-round.
 - H Most people who live in Los Angeles have nicknames.
 - J Los Angeles should be called "Fancyland."

D Check Up

Read each paragraph. Then choose the best topic sentence for each paragraph.

1. _____ . The seated statue of Lincoln gazes out over the Reflecting Pool. Inscribed on the walls are two of the famous speeches Lincoln gave. One mural shows the Angel of Truth freeing a slave. Another mural shows the unity of North and South.
 - A Lincoln was a great president.
 - B Lincoln was shot at the theater.
 - C The Lincoln Memorial is in Washington, D.C.
 - D There is much to see at the Lincoln Memorial.

2. _____ . In 1396 the queen of Denmark declared that an inn be built every 20 miles along the country's main roads. In 1500 the law was changed to provide an inn every ten miles. The tradition of kindness continues today. Modern travelers can find a good bed and a meal wherever they go in Denmark.
 - F Danish inns are better than hotels.
 - G For centuries, Denmark has been a good place to travel.
 - H Denmark's history is interesting.
 - J In Denmark, if you close your inn you could be arrested.

3. _____ . It makes him happy when his students learn. He likes leading discussions about insects, rainbows, and other science topics. Most of all, he enjoys experiments.
 - A There are over 700,000 known species of insects.
 - B Allen knows a lot about insects.
 - C Allen is an excellent scientist.
 - D Allen loves being a science teacher.

4. _____ . There is a large grocery store right across the street from her apartment. Right on the corner is her favorite Italian bakery. The library is two blocks away. Best of all, Donna works right next door to where she lives.
 - F Donna's home is on the bus line.
 - G Donna found a job that she likes.
 - H Donna has everything she needs right in her neighborhood.
 - J Donna enjoys Italian foods.

5. _____ . Its red color always made it stand out from other planets and the stars. Mars became even more interesting when scientists discovered strange markings on it. People wondered if the markings were really canals dug by Martians.
 - A People have always been fascinated by the planet Mars.
 - B Martians may invade Earth.
 - C Mars is becoming a vacation spot.
 - D The atmosphere on Mars would be deadly to humans.