

A strong paragraph contains a main idea/claim with supporting details. This main idea/claim is expressed as the paragraph's topic sentence. A paragraph's topic sentence does double-duty: it serves as the paragraph's focus and supports the essay's thesis statement.

Tips for a good topic sentence:

1. Topic sentences should show a **connection to the overall thesis** of the paper.

Essay Thesis: *Travelling to Italy last summer taught me many useful lessons about **how to be ❶ independent, more aware of ❷ money management, and ❸ thankful for my friends and family.***

Supporting Point ❶ = independence

✓ **Related Topic Sentence:** *When I travelled alone to Italy, I learned a valuable lesson about being independent, which has been beneficial in my life.*

vs.

✗ **Unrelated Topic Sentence:** *Italy was a very beautiful country, with rolling olive groves and vineyards.*

***** TIP:** In your own essays, reread your thesis statement. Then, read each topic sentence. Do they relate? Can you see the connection clearly?

2. In addition to showing the paragraph's main idea, topic sentences also indicate an **attitude or stance** toward the topic.

Topic Only: *When I travelled alone to Italy, I learned a lot about being independent.*

vs.

Topic + Attitude or Stance: *When I travelled alone to Italy, I learned a **valuable** lesson about being independent, which has been **beneficial** in my life.*

3. Topic sentences should be **specific**. Remember, you have to **prove** your topic sentence by the end of the paragraph!

✗ **Vague:** *I learned a lot from experiences I have had.*

vs.

✓ **Specific:** *When I travelled alone from Siena to Pisa, I learned that independence is developed by taking on new responsibilities, even when they are uncomfortable.*

*****TIP:** Underline each key word in the topic sentence. Ask questions about each key word: what experiences? What did you learn? When? Why? How much? etc.

Practice

- A. Reread the essay thesis in part 1 of this handout. For the remaining supporting points ② and ③, write a topic sentence that is specific and relates to the thesis statement.

Supporting Point ② = _____

Topic Sentence: _____

Supporting Point ③ = _____

Topic Sentence: _____

- B. Improve these topic sentences. You may invent details.

1. Going to school has taught me a lot.
2. The idea of 'self' is really important.
3. Work can help us have a more positive daily life.
4. There are reasons we should try to avoid this issue.
5. My sister is my role model.
6. Cell phones can cause danger.

Find out more. Search the web or a grammar book for: **topic sentences**. To practice, revise topic sentences you have written in previous essays or read sample essays and underline the topic sentences.