

Academic Writing

**the paragraph:**

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**the topic sentence**

# WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH?

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- A paragraph is a distinct section of writing
- **UNITY:** a paragraph focuses on one idea only
- **COHERENCE:** a paragraph is clearly organized; sentences need to be linked to each other
- **DEVELOPMENT:** the main point needs to be backed up by at least one reference; the paragraph needs to use examples to illustrate the point

# THE TOPIC SENTENCE

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- It's usually a good idea to start the paragraph with a **topic sentence**. All the sentences in the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence.
- The topic sentence consists of two parts: the **topic**, which names the subject or main idea of the paragraph, and the controlling idea, which makes a comment about the main idea. This is an example of a topic sentence:
- *Formalisation, an important element of organisational structure, has implications for management at both the macro-level and micro-level.*

# CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD TOPIC SENTENCE

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- It is specific enough to be clear and interesting
- It introduces the main idea of the paragraph
- It should not be a general fact which everyone accepts as true
- It should be linked to the thesis statement of the whole text
- The topic sentence is supported by supporting ideas, evidence and examples in the body of the paragraph (T-E-E structure)

# PLACEMENT OF THE TOPIC SENTENCE

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- Usually at the beginning of a paragraph
- Sometimes the topic sentence is the last sentence of a paragraph
- Sometimes the topic sentence is the first sentence of a paragraph but there is a concluding sentence (particularly in long paragraphs) as well
- Less commonly, the topic sentence can be elsewhere in the paragraph

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# Tasks

# Task 1

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*Find the topic sentence in the following paragraphs:*

a/ Does a hot, humid summer's day make you unproductive? Does a rainy day make you depressed? The weather seems to affect people's moods. Hot weather makes some people irritable, while others love the heat and are very happy and cheerful on a summer's day. Others don't mind the heat, but say they hate it when it is humid, because the humidity makes them tired.

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a/ Does a hot, humid summer's day make you unproductive? Does a rainy day make you depressed? **The weather seems to affect people's moods.** Hot weather makes some people irritable, while others love the heat and are very happy and cheerful on a summer's day. Others don't mind the heat, but say they hate it when it is humid, because the humidity makes them tired.



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b/ In most companies, staff need to be recruited and provided with conditions of employment. They also need to be protected in terms of their health and safety, and trained in the skills they need to do the job. A lot of companies provide the opportunity for staff to develop so that they can take on subsequent jobs. Companies are also there to put a performance plan in place for staff, assess them in terms of their performance, and reward them for their services. The Human Resources department of a company needs to address a large variety of needs.

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b/ In most companies, staff need to be recruited and provided with conditions of employment. They also need to be protected in terms of their health and safety, and trained in the skills they need to do the job. A lot of companies provide the opportunity for staff to develop so that they can take on subsequent jobs. Companies are also there to put a performance plan in place for staff, assess them in terms of their performance, and reward them for their services. **The Human Resources department of a company needs to address a large variety of needs.**

## Task 2

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*Create the best topic sentence for the following paragraph:*

First, Canada has an excellent health care system. All Canadians have access to medical services at a reasonable price. Second, Canada has a high standard of education. Students are taught by well-trained teachers and are encouraged to continue studying at university. Finally, Canada's cities are clean and efficiently managed. Canadian cities have many parks and lots of space for people to live. As a result, Canada is a desirable place to live.

*A possible answer (there are many other possibilities), the TS is in blue font*

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There are three reasons why Canada is one of the best countries in the world. First, Canada has an excellent health care system. All Canadians have access to medical services at a reasonable price. Second, Canada has a high standard of education. Students are taught by well-trained teachers and are encouraged to continue studying at university. Finally, Canada's cities are clean and efficiently managed. Canadian cities have many parks and lots of space for people to live. As a result, Canada is a desirable place to live.

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*Create the best topic sentence for the following paragraph:*

Albert Einstein, one of the world's geniuses, failed his university entrance examinations on his first attempt. William Faulkner, one of America's noted writers, never finished college because he could not pass his English courses. Sir Winston Churchill, who is considered one of the masters of the English language, had to have special tutoring in English during elementary school.

*A possible answer (there are many other possibilities), the TS is in blue font*

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Failure in school does not always predict failure in life. Albert Einstein, one of the world's geniuses, failed his university entrance examinations on his first attempt. William Faulkner, one of America's noted writers, never finished college because he could not pass his English courses. Sir Winston Churchill, who is considered one of the masters of the English language, had to have special tutoring in English during elementary school.

*Create the best topic sentence for the following paragraph:*

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## **Formalisation**

The word itself literally means having things written down. At the macro-level, the company will need to focus on organizational features. An example of formalization at this level is drawing up a chart detailing roles and responsibilities within the company. At the micro-level, its features would include clear stipulation of job descriptions, policies, procedures and rules. Although such documents may vary considerably in format, function and detail, they do share one underlying characteristic. Fundamentally, they are all examples of codification which specify what will be done, who will do it and how they will do it.

*Suggested TS in blue font:*

## **Formalisation**

Formalisation, an important element of organisational structure, has implications for management at both the macro-level and micro-level. The word itself literally means having things written down. At the macro-level, the company will need to focus on organizational features. An example of formalization at this level is drawing up a chart detailing roles and responsibilities within the company. At the micro-level, its features would include clear stipulation of job descriptions, policies, procedures and rules. Although such documents may vary considerably in format, function and detail, they do share one underlying characteristic. Fundamentally, they are all examples of codification which specify what will be done, who will do it and how they will do it.



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- Oshima, Alice and Ann Hogue, eds. *Writing Academic English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company 1991.
- “Topic sentence”. <http://www.personal.kent.edu/~rsonsteg/inst1.htm>. Web. October 6, 2015.