



The Writing Success Center

Topic Sentences

What Is a Topic Sentence?

In an essay, a topic sentence is the first sentence of a body paragraph; it introduces the main idea of that paragraph. This means that an essay with multiple body paragraphs will have multiple topic sentences. Each topic sentence should also connect to your thesis statement, which is the controlling idea for the entire essay.

Think of it this way...

Writing an essay is like building a house. Your thesis statement serves as the blueprint. A blueprint is the master plan of a building project – it's the big picture idea that guides construction, just like how your thesis is the big picture idea for your entire essay.

Your body paragraphs are like rooms inside the house, full of relevant supporting information. Each topic sentence functions as a doorway that provides a preview of what's inside the room.

Characteristics of a Topic Sentence

Clear and Concise: A topic sentence should be clear and to the point. Don't worry about making it sound fancy.

Focused on the Main Idea: It should state the purpose and focus of that specific paragraph without straying into other ideas.

Connects to the Thesis: It should relate directly to the thesis statement of the essay, providing support or evidence for the main argument.

Guides the Reader: A topic sentence should signal to the reader what to expect in the paragraph and how it contributes to the overall structure and argument of the essay.

Transitional: Sometimes, topic sentences also serve as transitions from the previous paragraph to the current one, making the essay "flow" more smoothly.

Topic Sentences Example

The blue sentence is the essay's thesis statement. It tells us the what the author is arguing or trying to prove.

The Benefits of Regular Exercise
by Professor Bette Latta (University of Tennessee)

In recent years, many people have become increasingly aware of the need for physical fitness. Almost everywhere people turn, whether it is to a newsstand, television or billboard, advice for guarding and improving health bombards them. Although much of this advice is commercially motivated by those eager to sell vitamins, natural foods and reducing gimmicks, some of it, especially those advocating a regular exercise program, merits serious attention. Such a program, if it consists of at least 30 minutes three times a week and if a person's physician approves it, provides numerous benefits. Regular exercise releases tension, improves appearance, and increases stamina.

The first of these benefits, the release of tension, is immediate. Tension builds in the body because of an over accumulation of adrenaline produced by stress, anxiety, or fear. Doctors agree that performing calisthenics or participating in an active sport such as tennis or volleyball for 30 minutes releases tension. If a person swims, jogs, or rides a bicycle for half that time, he or she should sleep better at night and have a better temperament the next day. In addition, after the release of tension, petty irritations and frustrations should be less troubling. For example, an employee upset by the day's work and by traffic congestion may rush home, argue with the family, and eat excessively. Taking about 30 minutes to release frustration through physical exercise could help the person to avoid this behavior. Planned physical exercise, therefore, can eliminate, or at least control, tension.

An improved appearance is the second benefit of regular exercise. Exercise takes perhaps a month or longer to show its results in a trimmer, firmer figure. Improvement, however, will come. A person who is 10 pounds overweight, for instance, may be able during this time to burn away most excess fat and to tighten muscles, thereby reshaping the physique. Having improved muscle tone and even posture, he or she will wear clothes more attractively and comfortably. Combined with a sensible diet, an exercise program will also improve a person's skin tone. This improved appearance will provide confidence and favorably impress others.

In addition to the self-confidence generated by an improved appearance, increased physical strength produces stamina. A stronger, healthier body is obviously more capable of working harder and, in fact, of withstanding normal fatigue than a tense, weak one. A worker who exercises should be able to complete a 40-hour week and still have enough energy for mowing the grass, painting the garage, or cleaning window. Similarly, the student who goes to school, keeps house and perhaps works part time should accomplish tasks efficiently. Equally important, this stamina helps to ward off illnesses such as colds and influenza. Altogether, improved endurance is one of the most important benefits of a regular exercise program.

Although easy solutions to the goals of losing weight and achieving an attractive, energetic body saturate the media, actually acquiring these benefits is not easy. The rewards, however, are fully worth the effort on an established exercise program that makes a person feel relaxed, look healthy, and have adequate strength for strenuous as well as routine activities.

The green sentences are topic sentences. Notice how they each focus on one idea at a time, and each of those ideas comes from the essay's thesis statement.