

TOPIC SENTENCES

A lesson for middle school students

Welcome to a two-part lesson on topic sentences designed especially for you and your middle school student. Sit back and relax. This lesson will do the teaching. You facilitate by checking in with your student and reviewing the answers on page 7 with him or her.



Some information found in these lessons is from *The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School* by Sharon Watson.

Students typically can finish these two lessons in less than one hour.

Here's what your students will be doing:

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LESSON 2: Learning and practicing three types of topic sentences p. 4

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LESSON 1: Learning about topic sentences

A topic sentence is a little like a store’s sign. When you read the sign, you know what’s in the store. For instance, you would expect to find burgers in a restaurant labeled Burger King® and shoes at Shoe Carnival.

Every paragraph needs a topic sentence—except two. The introduction and the conclusion of any essay or report do not have topic sentences. All the other paragraphs, the ones in the body, need topic sentences. That way, readers know what you are writing about.

Where do you come up with topic sentences? You get them from the points you planned for your essay or report. Let’s say you are going to write an essay on the benefits of riding a bicycle. Here are some possible points you could write down when you are thinking about this topic:



- Good exercise
- Saves money on gas and other car expenses
- Cuts down on pollution

Now your points become topic sentences for three separate paragraphs, like this:

- Riding a bicycle is great exercise.
- Save on gas money and other car expenses by riding a bike.
- Want to cut down on pollution?

Do you see how each point in the first list becomes a topic sentence?

Here’s an example of what the second one might look like in a paragraph:

The first sentence is the topic sentence for the rest of the paragraph.



Save on gas money and other car expenses by riding a bike. It costs a lot to own a car and maintain it. The price of gas is a huge expense that can grow larger overnight. Car insurance and repairs can be expensive, and so can new tires, oil changes, and license plates. Even little things like car washes can add up quickly, but relying on a bike to get you places is easy on your wallet.

Now it's your turn: 1

Think of a place you love or a place you can't stand. It could be as small as a room in your house or as large as a whole state or province. This place should be somewhere you've actually been to before, not somewhere you would like to go or somewhere in a book. Choose a real place you've been and write it here:

Now think of three reasons why you love or hate this place. Write them here:

Choose one of those points and write it into a topic sentence, something that can introduce the whole paragraph. Write your topic sentence here:

On a separate piece of paper, write your topic sentence and the whole paragraph about your point just as the writer did for the point about saving money by riding a bicycle. If you chose a place you love or hate, the rest of the sentences should be fairly easy to write because you really care about the topic.

End of Lesson 1

LESSON 2: Learning three types of topic sentences

Topic sentences come in many varieties. This section teaches three types: direct, interrogative, and climactic.

A **direct topic sentence** simply means that it is a declarative sentence and that it is the first one in the paragraph, like this:

Ants live in colonies.



The rest of that paragraph would talk about the structure of the colony and the different kinds of ants that live there.

An **interrogative topic sentence** asks a question, like this:

What happens to the ant colony if the queen dies?

The rest of that paragraph would explain what happens to the ants when they lose their queen.

A **climactic topic sentence** can be a declarative sentence or a question, but the important thing is that it's the last sentence in the paragraph, like this:

It costs a lot to own a car and maintain it. The price of gas is a huge expense that can grow larger overnight. Car insurance and repairs can be expensive, and so can new tires, oil changes, and license plates. Even little things like car washes can add up quickly and put a dent in your wallet.
Save on gas money and other car expenses by riding a bike.

There it is—at the end!



Of course, you won't underline yours.

Most of your topic sentences will be direct, and you'll write them as the first sentence of each paragraph in the body of your essay or report.

Now it's your turn: 2

Below you'll find one paragraph written out three times. The information in the paragraphs is paraphrased from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Follow the directions for each paragraph.

But first, read the paragraph and figure out what it's about.

Write a **direct** topic sentence for this paragraph and make it the first sentence in the paragraph:

_____ . When friends work together, they accomplish more. If one becomes depressed, a caring friend can always pick him up. People who have no one to help them recover may be at risk for certain health and emotional troubles. Friends look out for each other, sharing clothes and necessities; how can anyone do that alone? One person runs the risk of being attacked, but two people have a better chance of defending themselves. Friends working together are like a chord made of three strands—it is not easily broken.

Write an **interrogative** topic sentence for this paragraph (ask a question) and make it the first sentence in the paragraph:

_____ ? When friends work together, they accomplish more. If one becomes depressed, a caring friend can always pick him up. People who have no one to help them recover may be at risk for certain health and emotional troubles. Friends look out for each other, sharing clothes and necessities; how can anyone do that alone? One person runs the risk of being attacked, but two people have a better chance of defending themselves. Friends working together are like a chord made of three strands—it is not easily broken.

Write a **climactic** topic sentence for the last sentence in the paragraph:

When friends work together, they accomplish more. If one becomes depressed, a caring friend can always pick him up. People who have no one to help them recover may be at risk for certain health and emotional troubles. Friends look out for each other, sharing clothes and necessities; how can anyone do that alone? One person runs the risk of being attacked, but two people have a better chance of defending themselves. Friends working together are like a chord made of three strands—it is not easily broken. _____

_____.



End of Lesson 2

Answers to NOW IT'S YOUR TURN: 1

Choose a real place you've been and write it here: *Answers will vary. It's important that students choose a real place they've visited or lived in, and it's also important that they choose somewhere they have strong feelings about, whether it's love or detest. Choosing something with a strong feeling attached to it makes it easier to write about.*

Now think of three reasons why you love or hate this place. Write them here: *Answers will vary.*

Choose one of those points and write it into a topic sentence, something that can introduce the whole paragraph. Write your topic sentence here: *Answers will vary.*

On a separate piece of paper, write your topic sentence and the whole paragraph about your point just as the writer did for the point about saving money by riding a bicycle. If you chose a place you love or hate, the rest of the sentences should be fairly easy to write because you really care about the topic. *Answers will vary*

Answers to NOW IT'S YOUR TURN: 2

Below you'll find one paragraph written out three times. The information in the paragraphs is paraphrased from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Follow the directions for each paragraph.

But first, read the paragraph and figure out what it's about.

Write a **direct** topic sentence for this paragraph and make it the first sentence in the paragraph: *One possibility is underlined below:*

We need friends. When friends work together, they accomplish more. If one becomes depressed, a caring friend can always pick him up. People who have no one to help them recover may be at risk for certain health and emotional troubles. Friends look out for each other, sharing clothes and necessities; how can anyone do that alone? One person runs the risk of being attacked, but two people have a better chance of defending themselves. Friends working together are like a chord made of three strands—it is not easily broken.

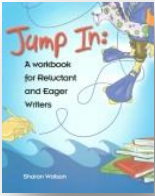
Write an **interrogative** topic sentence for this paragraph (ask a question) and make it the first sentence in the paragraph: *Two possible interrogative topic sentences: (1) Why do we need friends? (2) What are the advantages of having friends?*

_____ ? When friends work together, they accomplish more. If one becomes depressed, a caring friend can always pick him up. People who have no one to help them recover may be at risk for certain health and emotional troubles. Friends look out for each other, sharing clothes and necessities; how can anyone do that alone? One person runs the risk of being attacked, but two people have a better chance of defending themselves. Friends working together are like a chord made of three strands—it is not easily broken.

Write a **climactic** topic sentence for the last sentence in the paragraph: *One possibility is underlined below:*

When friends work together, they accomplish more. If one becomes depressed, a caring friend can always pick him up. People who have no one to help them recover may be at risk for certain health and emotional troubles. Friends look out for each other, sharing clothes and necessities; how can anyone do that alone? One person runs the risk of being attacked, but two people have a better chance of defending themselves. Friends working together are like a chord made of three strands—it is not easily broken.
Don't try to go through life without friends.

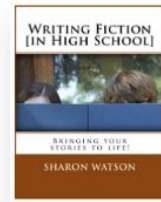
If you and your student liked this lesson but would like a full writing curriculum for middle school or high school students, consider these options from Writing with Sharon Watson:



*Jump In: A workbook for
Reluctant and Eager Writers*
Middle School
Nonfiction and Fiction



*The Power in Your Hands:
Writing Nonfiction in High
School*



Writing Fiction [in High School]