**Topic Sentence Exercise**

A well-organized paragraph supports or develops a single controlling idea, which is expressed in a sentence called the topic sentence. Afterwards, the body of a paragraph explains, develops or supports with evidence the topic sentence's main idea or claim, using examples, statistics, facts, stories, quotations, and other supporting evidence . A topic sentence has several important functions:

* it substantiates or supports an essay’s thesis statement;
* it unifies the content of a paragraph and directs the order of the sentences;
* and it advises the reader of the subject to be discussed and how the paragraph will discuss it.

 Readers generally look to the first few sentences in a paragraph to determine the subject and perspective of the paragraph. I remember when my wife was in law school and she had to read hundreds of pages in a single night. I told her the best way to skim and still get the substance was to read the first sentence of every paragraph (the topic sentences) and then read the paragraphs that look important based on their topic sentences.

Although most paragraphs should have a topic sentence, there are a few situations when a paragraph might not need a topic sentence. For example, you might be able to omit a topic sentence in a paragraph that narrates a series of events as you will find in fictional stories or if a paragraph **continues** developing an idea that you introduced (with a topic sentence) in the previous paragraph. The vast majority of your paragraphs, however, should have a topic sentence.

The following paragraph illustrates this pattern of organization. In this paragraph the topic sentence and concluding sentence (CAPITALIZED) both help the reader keep the paragraph’s main point in mind.

SCIENTISTS HAVE LEARNED TO SUPPLEMENT THE SENSE OF SIGHT IN NUMEROUS WAYS. In front of the tiny pupil of the eye **they put**, on Mount Palomar, a great monocle 200 inches in diameter, and with it see 2000 times farther into the depths of space. **Or they look** through a small pair of lenses arranged as a microscope into a drop of water or blood, and magnify by as much as 2000 diameters the living creatures there, many of which are among man’s most dangerous enemies. **Or**, if we want to see distant happenings on earth, **they use** some of the previously wasted electromagnetic waves to carry television images which they re-create as light by whipping tiny crystals on a screen with electrons in a vacuum. **Or they can bring** happenings of long ago and far away as colored motion pictures, by arranging silver atoms and color-absorbing molecules to force light waves into the patterns of original reality. **Or** if we want to see into the center of a steel casting or the chest of an injured child, **they send** the information on a beam of penetrating short-wave X rays, and then convert it back into images we can see on a screen or photograph. THUS ALMOST EVERY TYPE OF ELECTROMAGNETIC RADIATION YET DISCOVERED HAS BEEN USED TO EXTEND OUR SENSE OF SIGHT IN SOME WAY.

 -George Harrison, “Faith and the Scientist”

Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph below:

A post-secondary education can have very positive effects on income and employment.  Numerous studies conducted in the United States over the past ten years have demonstrated that earnings for anyone with a post-secondary education are on average twenty percent higher than the earnings of those whose education stopped with a high school diploma.  Incomes are higher still for those with four-year degrees, and even higher at the master’s and doctoral levels.  Regardless of the post-secondary degree level, graduates are fifteen percent less likely to be laid off in difficult economic times.

The time a person spends preparing for a project will never go wasted. What will be wasted is the time people spend correcting mistakes in a poorly-planned project. In her book, Success Step-by-Step, efficiency expert Caroline Jefferson says, “The old adage is true: most people who fail to plan to fail.” Poorly-planned projects leave people wondering how they should proceed, so they spend their time addressing small details instead of working on big issues. At the end of the project, they have no time, lots of stress, and, considering the hours they have spent on the project little to show for it.

Soon after the spraying had ended there were unmistakable signs that all was not well. Within two days dead and dying fish, including many young salmon, were found along the banks of the stream. Brook trout also appeared among the dead fish, and along the roads and in the woods birds were dying. All the life of the stream was stilled. Before the spraying there had been a rich assortment of the water life that forms the food of salmon and trout — caddis fly larvae, living in loosely fitting protective cases of leaves, stems or gravel cemented together with saliva, stonefly nymphs clinging to rocks in the swirling currents, and the wormlike larvae of blackflies edging the stones under riffles or where the stream spills over steeply slanting rocks. But now the stream insects were dead, killed by DDT, and there was nothing for a young salmon to eat.

 -Rachel Carson *Silent Spring*

The punishment of criminals has always been a problem for society. Citizens have had to decide whether offenders such as first-degree murderers should be killed in a gas chamber, imprisoned for life, or rehabilitated and given a second chance in society. Many citizens argue that serious criminals should be executed. They believe that killing criminals will set an example for others and also rid society of a cumbersome burden. Other citizens say that no one has the right to take a life and that capital punishment is not a deterrent to crime. They believe that society as well as the criminal is responsible for the crimes and that killing the criminal does not solve the problems of either society or the criminal.

Now create a topic sentence for the following paragraph:

During the 1990s, I really enjoyed watching *Friends* on television every Thursday night. I really wanted Rachel’s haircut—I think every girl wanted Rachel’s haircut back then! Rachel’s haircut went really well with the Guess Jeans that were so popular in the 1990s. I remember all the advertisements for Guess and Calvin Klein Jeans that were in each month’s *Sassy* magazine. I don’t think *Sassy* magazine exists anymore, but it was one of the most popular magazines for young women in the 1990s.

Good vs bad Topic Sentences (It should not be a fact and it should not be too general. Focus on being specific and answering why as well as the other five questions. Example: After visiting her in-laws, Maria loved to relax by listening to Nina Simone on her ipod, taking a warm bath, and reading a light mystery.) Put an x on the left side by the bad ones below and correct them to the right of the sentences:

Last week I went to school.

People waste time.

Debbie is very tall.

Columbus was an explorer in the 1400s.

Isaac is a good writer.

I don’t like diapers even though I love my children.