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## The Topic Sentence

We have already said that a paragraph deals with one main idea and the sentence which contains this central idea is called the **topic sentence**. The aim of this lesson is to give a fuller view of this sentence to enable students to have a stronger grasp of the subject.

The topic sentence in a paragraph is equivalent to the introduction (the thesis statement) to an essay. It introduces the theme or topic of the entire paragraph. It is like a signpost which will lead you into the text that follows. In other words, it will contain a controlling idea to control or direct the rest of the paragraph. The whole of the paragraph is to be developed according to the plan made in the topic sentence. By clearly expressing the main idea it helps the reader to follow the track with ease and comfort. It also helps the writer to be on the track.

As for the position of the topic sentence, it may appear anywhere in the paragraph. You may find it right at the beginning or in the middle or at the end. Sometimes, it may so happen that the topic sentence is not at all present. Instead of being written down, it remains then in the writer's mind. However, no paragraph in this book will appear without it. In most cases, it comes at the beginning of the paragraph. But you should bear in mind that in some kinds of paragraph it is more effective to place the topic sentence at the end.

Wherever it is placed, it must say what your paragraph is about. It must clearly express the central idea. It may either be general or specific.

You should bear in mind that the topic sentence is an inviolable guide. The plan it gives should be strictly followed. Any departure from or violation of the plan will spoil your

paragraph. Here is a topic sentence with its controlling idea in bold print.

**"Smoking is harmful for four reasons."**

If you analyse this topic sentence, you will see that the intended paragraph is about the harmfulness of smoking. That means, harmfulness of smoking is the theme or main idea of the paragraph. In addition to the mention of the central idea, it also contains a controlling idea or plan. This topic sentence suggests that the writer has made a plan to describe four reasons why smoking is harmful. S/He is now a sort of bound to stick to this plan. If s/he incorporates anything else in the paragraph, all her / his effort will be futile. The paragraph will be altogether bad. It is, therefore, obligatory for the writer to follow the plan stated in the topic sentence.

The controlling idea in the topic sentence is generally expressed in noun phrases and adjectives. These noun phrases usually consist of determiners and nouns. Some such noun phrases are given below:

|                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>some problems</b>         | <b>several advantages</b>      |
| <b>these reasons</b>         | <b>many amenities</b>          |
| <b>different methods</b>     | <b>four possible solutions</b> |
| <b>the following results</b> | <b>various effects</b>         |
| <b>a number of ways</b>      |                                |

The controlling idea may also be expressed in such adjectives as:

|                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| <b>harmful</b>   | <b>useful</b>      |
| <b>important</b> | <b>unimportant</b> |
| <b>fortunate</b> | <b>unfortunate</b> |
| <b>necessary</b> | <b>unnecessary</b> |
| <b>suitable</b>  | <b>unsuitable</b>  |

### THE MAIN POINTS

- i) The topic sentence highlights the main idea of the paragraph.
- ii) It must have a controlling idea to control or direct the rest of the paragraph.

- iii) In most cases the topic sentence appears at the beginning of the paragraph.
- iv) The plan of the topic sentence must be observed.

### VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT

- departure**—going away: turning away or aside
- equivalent**—equal in value
- futile**—of no use: without result
- (to) grasp**— seize firmly with hands; understand with the mind; (n) power of understanding.
- (to) highlight**— give prominence or importance to
- (to) incorporate**— make united in one body or group
- inviolable**— that cannot be violated
- obligatory**— which is required by rule or custom
- off the track**— away from the subject
- (to) stick to**— be faithful to

### EXERCISES

- Here are some topic sentences. Identify the controlling idea in each of them:
  - There are many interesting sights at Chittagong to attract tourists.
  - Taking this medicine has a number of side effects.
  - Mr. Solaiman was sacked from his office for several factors.
  - The cow is a useful domestic animal.
  - Travelling abroad is very educative.
- In each of the following pairs of sentences one is a better topic sentence than the other. Say which one is better and why:
  - (i) Physical exercise is very good for health.
    - I take physical exercise regularly.
  - (i) Our liberation war ended in December 1971.
    - We fought for our liberation for four main reasons.

- (i) Student politics is bad.
  - Student politics has some obvious drawbacks.
- (i) Mr. Haque was a great patriot.
  - Mr. Haque will be remembered for his wonderful achievements.

### 3. Choose one topic sentence from the group below to fit into the following paragraph.

- Travelling by a public transport is risky.
- When you travel by a public transport, some of your bad habits should be restrained.
- You should be careful on a public transport.

Firstly, you should not smoke, because smoking is harmful for the public health. Secondly, you should not litter the bus or train by dropping paper or skins of fruits. Thirdly, you should never spit on the public transport. You also should not speak loudly to disturb your fellow passengers. You should avoid these things when you use a public transport.

### 4. Write a suitable topic sentence for the paragraph below:

You can go by bus. If you do not like the bus journey you can go by train. If you can afford an expensive journey, you can also go by plane. These are the three possible routes for going to Dhaka from Rajshahi.