

WRITING THE TOPIC SENTENCE

A well-built paragraph often starts with a sentence that sums up the key idea. We call this key sentence the **topic sentence**. To write a topic sentence, we look at related material that we have collected and ask: “What is the point? What conclusion do these data justify?”

Look at the following data about an imaginary roommate, and at the conclusion they justify:

When I first came to school, he showed me around the campus. He has never complained about lending me his comb, his typewriter, and his tuxedo. When driving, he stops for pedestrians and allows other drivers to pass if they are in a hurry. Every Saturday, he writes a long letter to his invalid aunt, because he knows it makes her feel good to hear from him.

Conclusion: *My roommate is very considerate.*

Here is a different set of data, funneling into a different conclusion.

When he is asked to help around the house, he always has some important home work to do or a club meeting to go to. When someone states passing him on the highway, he steps on the gas. When someone borrows his typewriter, he complains about the condition in which it is returned.

Conclusion: *My roommate is very inconsiderate.*

In the typical all-purpose paragraph, we present the conclusion first, as our topic sentence. The topic sentence tells the reader: “This is what I am trying to prove. This is what I am trying to show.” Then we present the data that help prove the point. We present the examples that show what we mean.

Each of the following sets of data provides the input for a paragraph. In the blank space preceding the data, write a conclusion that could serve as topic sentence for the paragraph.

1. **TOPIC SENTENCE:**

In Canada, French-speaking Canadians have been working toward greater recognition of their language and political rights. In Britain, much controversy has been caused by the fight for greater self-determination for Scotland and Wales. In Spain, Basque terrorists have been fighting to preserve their separate language and separate national identity. In France, people in such areas as Corsica and Alsace are protesting against the domination of national affairs by the central government in Paris.