

TOPIC

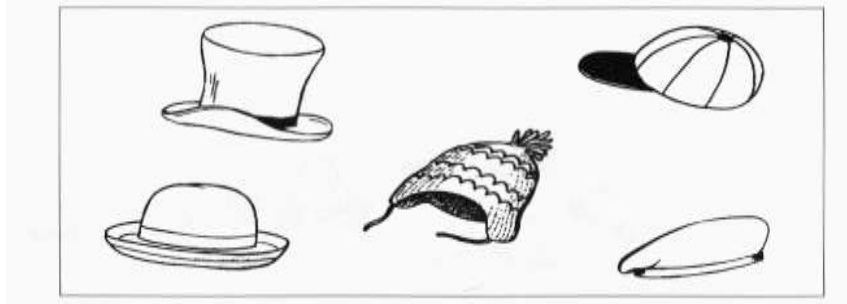
What is a "topic"?

A topic tells what something is about. Good readers always look for the topic when they read. Then they can understand and remember what they read.

There are two kinds of topics.

1. One kind of topic is the name of a group of things.
2. Another kind of topic is the name of a thing with many parts.

1. Topics that are names of groups



What is the topic of this picture?

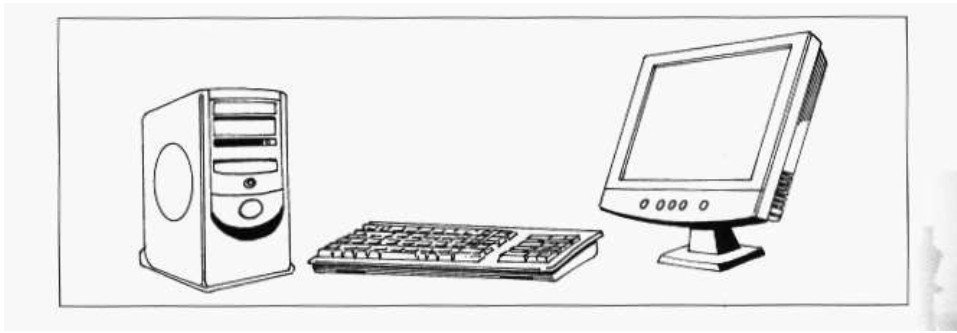
Topic: HATS

Exercise 1:

Find the topic word in each group of words and circle it. Then write the topic on the line.

1. **Topic: color**
red yellow blue orange brown
2. Topic : _____
Pop music rock country classical jazz
3. Topic: _____
animals cats dogs horses pigs elephants
4. Topic: _____
brother son father men grandfather uncle
5. Topic: _____
apple banana orange fruit pear mango
6. Topic: _____
morning night times of day evening afternoon noon
7. Topic: _____
Walks talks sleeps builds verbs begins
8. Topic: _____
Shirts clothes dresses pants coats socks
9. Topic: _____
Hotels hospitals banks schools buildings theaters
10. Topic: _____
Japan Brazil China France Korea countries

2. Topics that name things with many parts.



Topic: computer

Exercise 1:

Find the topic word in each group of words and circle it. Then write the topic on the line. Work with another student.

1. topic: -----

Husband family son daughter cousin wife

2. Topic: -----

trees flowers grass birds bushes garden

3. Topic: -----

Arms legs neck body head feet

4. Topic: -----

Students books teacher pens paper classroom

5. Topic: -----

nose head mouth ears hair eyes

6. Topic: -----

wheels doors windows seats car engine

7. Topic: -----

Minute second hour day time week

8. Topic: -----

building roof walls doors stairs windows

9. Topic: -----

apartment bedroom living room kitchen bathroom hall

10. Topic: -----

desk computer bookcase office chair telephone

Topic Sentence

A topic sentence is the most important sentence in a paragraph. Sometimes referred to as a **focus sentence**, the topic sentence helps organize the paragraph by summarizing the information in the paragraph. In formal writing, the topic sentence is usually the first sentence in a paragraph (although it doesn't always have to be).

Purpose of the Topic Sentence

A topic sentence essentially tells what the rest of the paragraph is about. All sentences after it have to give more information about the sentence, prove it by offering facts about it, or describe it. For example, if the topic sentence concerns the types of endangered species that live in the ocean, then every sentence after that needs to expound on that subject.

Topic sentences also need to relate back to the thesis of the essay. The thesis statement is like a road map that will tell the reader or listener where you are going with this information or how you are treating it.

Topic Sentences and Controlling Ideas

Every topic sentence will have a **topic** and a **controlling idea**. The controlling idea shows the direction the paragraph will take.

Here are some examples:

- Topic Sentence: There are many reasons why pollution in ABC Town is the worst in the world.
- The topic is "**pollution in ABC Town is the worst in the world**" and the controlling idea is "**many reasons.**"
- Topic Sentence: To be an effective CEO requires certain characteristics.
- The topic is "**To be an effective CEO**"
- the controlling idea is **certain characteristics.**
- Topic Sentence: There are many possible contributing factors to global warming.
- The topic is "**contributing factors to global warming**"
- the controlling factor is "**many reasons.**"
- Topic Sentence: Fortune hunters encounter many difficulties when exploring a shipwreck.
- The topic is "**exploring a shipwreck**"
- the controlling idea is "**many difficulties.**"
- Topic Sentence: Dogs make wonderful pets because they help you to live longer.
- The topic is "**dogs make wonderful pets**"
- the controlling idea is "**because they help you to live longer.**"
- Topic Sentence: Crime in poverty-stricken areas occurs as a result of a systemic discrimination.
- The topic is "**crime in poverty stricken areas**"
- the controlling idea is "**systemic discrimination.**"
- Topic Sentence: Cooking requires a number of different skills.
- The topic is "**cooking**"
- the controlling idea is "**many different skills.**"

- Topic Sentence: It is important to be ready before buying a house.
- The topic is "before buying a house"
- the controlling idea is the importance of being ready.
- Topic Sentence: Graduating from high school is important for many different reasons.
- The topic is "graduating from high school"
- the controlling idea is "many different reasons."
- Topic Sentence: Having a first child is difficult because of the significant adjustments in your life.
- The topic is "having a first child"
- the controlling idea is "significant adjustments in your life."
- Topic Sentence: Remodeling a kitchen successfully requires research and a good eye.
- The topic is "remodeling a kitchen"
- the controlling idea is "requires research and a good eye."

As you can see, the topic sentence provides a focus for the reader or listener. It tells what the paragraph is about. The controlling idea helps the audience understand what you are saying.

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of sentences about one topic. There is usually one sentence that tells you the topic. All the other sentences tell more about the topic. Good readers look for the topic that way. Every paragraph has one important sentence which is called **topic sentence.** (focus sentence)

Example:

1. Is this a good paragraph?

Every morning, Susan Powers eats a big breakfast. She eats two eggs, one slice of bread, and a banana. She drinks a glass of orange juice and a big cup of tea. Susan says she is ready to go to work after a good breakfast.

Yes ☐

No ☐

2. Is this a good paragraph?

Every morning, Susan Powers eats a big breakfast. She works in a bank in New York. Many people work at the bank. Some people go shopping before work. Others go shopping in the morning. On rainy days, they all bring their umbrellas to work.

Yes ☐

No ☐

REMEMBER

- A good paragraph has one topic.
- All the sentences are about that topic.

Exercise 2:

Read these groups of sentences. Are they all good paragraphs? Is each paragraph about one topic?

New York City

1. Visitors come to New York from all over the world. In New York, they can go to the museums. They can do business on Wall Street, and they can go to the theaters. People like the many good restaurants and nightclubs in New York. They also love shopping for special things in big stores and small shops. Visitors can have a good time in New York.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐ No ☐

2. Central Park is a very big park in New York. It is usually full of people. The Bronx Zoo is usually full of visitors. Many taxis drive down Fifth Avenue. Young families bring their children to play there. Other people like to run or ride their bicycles by the river. You can meet friends at a small restaurant.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐ No ☐

3. New York is one big city. But the city has many different parts. In some parts, most of the people are rich. In some parts, most of the people are poor. Students and working people live in other parts. And in some parts, there are many people from the same country. For example, a part of New York is called Little Italy, and another part is called Chinatown.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐ No ☐

4. Chinatown is in the southern part of New York City. Most of the people in Chinatown are Chinese. Street signs and shop signs are written in Chinese. Many other New Yorkers like to go there. They like to eat at the Chinese restaurants. They like to shop in Chinese stores.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐ No ☐

5. New York City is home to more than 8,000,000 (eight million) people. Another big city is Los Angeles, California. Near Los Angeles, people can visit Hollywood and look for movie stars. There are two airports in New York. The tallest building in the United States is in Chicago.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐ No ☐

Exercise 3

Read these groups of sentences. Are they all good paragraphs? Is each paragraph about one topic?

Music

1. Many people like listening to music. Some people go to concerts. They like to watch people make music. Other people listen to music at home. They can listen to tapes or CDs. They can also listen to music on MTV or on the computer.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐ No ☐

2. There are many famous opera singers. Luciano Pavarotti is a famous opera singer. He's from Modena, Italy. Modena is a beautiful small city in the north of Italy. You can find lots of good cheese and wine in Italy. Italian people eat lots of pasta.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐

No ☐

3. Jazz music began in America. Many famous rock stars are English. In Boston you can listen to lots of good classical music. Bjork is a very popular pop singer. She is from Iceland. She also sings her songs in movies. John Williams writes music for the movies. He wrote the music for the movie about Harry Potter.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐

No ☐

4. Young people often listen to loud music. They listen to loud music on their headphones. They go to very loud concerts. All this loud music is bad for their ears. In fact, many young people cannot hear very well.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐

No ☐

5. Music can help people in many ways. It can help people who are sick. The music makes them forget they are sick. It can also help people who are unhappy. It makes them feel better about their lives. Music is like medicine for many people. But it is better than medicine because it is free.

Is this a good paragraph? Yes ☐

No ☐

Exercise 5:

Read the paragraphs below. Ask these questions: What is this paragraph about? What is the topic? Then circle the best topic for each paragraph.

Computers and the Internet

1. People use computers in many jobs these days. Writers use computers to write books or articles. With computers, they can print their work fast. Then they can read it and make changes and print it again. Musicians use computers to write music. They play the music on computers, and then print it out. Business people use computers, too. They use them to write letters and reports. They also use them to do math and work on their business. Scientists also use computers to do lots of math fast. And they use computers to make pictures of things. Then they can study the pictures to understand something better.

What is the best topic?

- a. How business people use computers
- b. Ways people use computers for work
- c. Different kinds of jobs these days

2. Do you have an e-mail address? Millions of people around the world have e-mail addresses. With e-mail, you can “talk” with people from Montevideo to Kyoto. It does not cost very much, and it is fast. E-mail helps many people with their work. Other people use it for fun. They talk with their families or with their friends. They also make friends with new people that they “meet” on the Internet.

- a. Telephone communication
- b. How e-mail helps at work
- c. How people use e-mail

3. If you want to use e-mail, you need a connection to the Internet. You can connect to the Internet through a telephone line or by cable or satellite. You write your e-mail message on the computer and you give the computer an address. Then you tell the computer to send the message to that address. Your computer sends it to a big computer, called a server. The server sends your letter to another server. That server sends it to the e-mail address that you gave it. That is how e-mail works.

- a. How e-mail works
- b. How the Internet talks to computers
- c. How a telephone line works

4. Many people use the Internet to get information. They get information from library web sites, for example. On the web sites they can read newspapers, magazines, and books. People also look at web sites for businesses. A company's web site tells about the things a company makes, does, or sells. And people use the Internet for travel information. They can find out about flights and hotels from travel web sites. They can also print out maps and pictures.

- a. Reading newspapers on the Internet
- b. Using the Internet to get information
- c. Getting information for your work

5. These days, people can do a lot of business on the Internet. For example, you don't have to go to the bank. You can do your banking on the Internet. You may want to buy tickets for a concert. You can do that on the Internet, too. You can also do lots of shopping on the Internet—for food, clothes, books, and other things. You choose what you want from the pictures on the Internet. Then you buy it with your credit card and it comes to your house.

- a. Doing business on the Internet
- b. Shopping on the Internet
- c. The Internet today

Special Sport

1. Swimming, bicycling, and running are three very popular sports. Some people like to do all three sports in one race. They can do all three in a triathlon race. *Triathlon* means "three sports." In a triathlon, the people swim for a mile (1.6 km). Then they have to ride a bicycle for about 10 miles (16 km). And then they have to run for 3 miles (4.8 km). You must be a very strong person to win a triathlon!

- a. What people do in a triathlon
- b. Popular sports today
- c. Swimming in a triathlon

2. The men and women in triathlons are called triathletes. Triathletes must work hard all year to get ready. Every day, they run and swim and ride their bicycles. They must also do special exercises for their bodies. After many months of work, they are ready for a race. There are many races in many countries. One famous triathlon is the Ironman race in Hawaii. Another is the Noosa race in Australia. Triathletes come to these races from all over the world.

- a. The Ironman race

- b. Races in many countries
- c. Triathletes and triathlons

3. Karen Smyers and Mark Allen are two famous triathletes. Karen Smyers is from the United States. She gets ready for triathlons all year, and she goes to many races. That is her job.

The Nike Company gives her money to live. Mark Allen is also a full-time triathlete, and he is also from the United States. Karen and Mark won women's and men's triathlons in many different countries. They also were the winners in the Ironman race in Hawaii.

- a. The Ironman race
- b. Triathletes in the United States
- c. Two famous triathletes

Exercise 6:

In each paragraph there is one extra sentence. It is not about the topic. Find the sentence and cross it out. Then write the topic.

Hobbies

1. In-line skating is a very popular new sport. People in many countries around the world go in-line skating. In-line skates go on your feet like roller skates and ice skates. They have little wheels, all in a line. When you are inline skating, you have to be careful. It is also a good idea to ride your bicycle. At first, you should go slowly. You should not go on streets with lots of cars or people. And you should always wear special in-line skating clothes.

Topic: In-line skating

2. In his free time, Jeff loves to go bicycling. After many hours in the office, he wants exercise. So on weekends he goes for long bicycle rides. He works just a few miles from his home. Sometimes he rides his bicycle for a few hours and sometimes he rides all day. Some of his friends also ride bicycles. They often ride their bicycles together. The doctor says Jeff is very healthy and has very strong legs.

Topic:

3. On summer days, Liz works in her garden. She has some flowers and lots of vegetables. She likes the flowers, but she doesn't work with them a lot. She works most of the time with the vegetables, and she also likes to cook them. Liz likes going to the movies with her friends. She does not eat meat, so she eats lots of her vegetables. She says they are much better than the vegetables from the store.

Topic:

4. Mike loves to cook. He cooks all kinds of dishes, but his favorite dishes are desserts. He says cooking is very relaxing. When he is working in the kitchen, he thinks only about cooking. He doesn't think about work or about bad things. He can bake big, beautiful cakes with fruit or with chocolate. Children must not eat a lot of chocolate every day. On Saturdays, Mike has lots of time for cooking. He makes a very good dinner and a special dessert for his family.

Topic: