Paragraph Writing – Topic Sentence Methods

*Topic sentences:*

* *State the subject*
* *Tell the reader what will be proved or explained*

1. **Power (Number) Statements**

A power (number) statement is a sentence that contains a number word. The number word is the focus of the sentence; it tells the reader that a list of information will follow.

Helpful number words:

a couple of a number of numerous some various

a few four plenty of three

a myriad many several two

**Examples:**

1. *Three* cities have serious pollution problems.
2. In the winter I enjoy watching *several* sports on television.
3. The new students learned *four* important procedures.
4. Like many Canadian cities, Edmonton is faced with *many* problems including homelessness, gang violence, and unemployment.
5. Tourists visiting Toronto will want to visit *three* spectacular sights.
6. Television offers *a myriad of* shows that are suitable for small children.
7. The mayor promised *several* changes he would make if elected.
8. The earthquake in Haiti has created *various* problems for the Haitian people.
9. My friend Tanya has *three* positive qualities that I admire.
10. You should quit drinking alcohol for *a number of* reasons.

THERE ARE

Note: Try to avoid “There are” or “There is” for your topic sentences whenever possible. Try to change your sentence around to begin with a *who, what, where, when*.

**Example:**

There are many advantages of living in a city. Living in the city provides you with many advantages.

There are several kinds of music I enjoy. I really like to listen to several kinds of music.

1. **And/But/Or Statements**

This method creates a compound topic sentence. Remember to use a comma before the conjunction.

and but/yet or nor so

**Examples:**

1. Some people find it difficult to write a paragraph, *but* most will succeed if they just remember to follow these guidelines.
2. Citizens can continue to accept crime and violence as a fact of life, *or* they can get involved in their communities to make things better.
3. Reptiles are alike because they are cold blooded animals, *yet* they come in a variety of shapes and sizes.
4. I thought that I wanted to buy a house, *but* I realized that there are several advantages to buying a condominium.
5. Rosa Parks was “The mother of the Civil Rights Movement”, *and* she taught me about courage and determination.
6. The government should not cut health care, *nor* should they sacrifice education to save money.
7. My friends all continue to smoke, *but* I quit smoking for three reasons.
8. My mother likes to help others, *so* she volunteers at her church, at a hospital, and at an elementary school.
9. I enjoy most seasons, *but* summer is my favorite.
10. I met a new friend in class, *and* I learned that we have a number of things in common.
11. **Occasion/Position Statements**

An Occasion/Position statement is a complex (two-part) sentence that begins with one of these words or phrases.

After As soon as Even though Whenever As long as

Although Because If Though Before

After Even if Until Whether When

While Since

The Occasion:

* Is the first part of the topic sentence
* Introduces your reason for writing
* Can be any event, problem, idea, solution, or situation that gives you reason to write
* Is the dependent clause in the complex sentence

The Position:

* Is the second part of the topic sentence
* States what you plan to prove or explain in your paragraph
* Is the independent clause in the complex sentence

**Examples (The plain text shows the occasion. The italics shows the *position*.)**

1. Although I have visited many wonderful countries, *none was more fun and exciting than Italy*.
2. Before you make the decision to light up a cigarette, *consider the problems caused by smoking.*
3. Even though a lot of people don’t want to wear a helmet when they ride their bicycle, *all cyclists should wear them.*
4. If children want an allowance, *it is important that they do chores to earn it.*
5. When I moved to Edmonton, *the people who became my friends were my classmates.*
6. If you are looking to rent a good movie, *I recommend “My Big Fat Greek Wedding”.*
7. Before I came to school, *I thought it would be easy, but I was wrong*.
8. Even if cell phones were free, *I would not want one*!
9. When I was planning to move to Canada, *my relatives gave me some good advice*.
10. Although most people prefer to drive a car, *I prefer taking the bus for many reasons*.
11. Because of the accident, *my life changed in several ways*.
12. Since I was young, *I have always wanted to have my own business*.
13. Whenever I feel blue, *I go to West Edmonton Mall to lift my spirits*.
14. After I got a raise, *I have been able to do much more with the money I earn*.
15. Even though winter is long and cold in Canada, *I enjoy many things about it*.

**Transition Words – Transitions help the writer and the reader**

Transitions are used when the writer wants to introduce a new idea (major point). They point out the key ideas in a paragraph.

Transitions don’t always have to begin a sentence. Sometimes you can **bury transitions**, which means the transition is placed somewhere other than the first word.

**Example:**

*First*, I went to visit my cousin. (The transition is at the beginning of the main point)

Visiting my cousin in Vancouver was the *first* big event of my holiday. (The transition is buried)

***Example 1***

**Saturdays**

On Saturdays I like to do two things. First, I like to sleep in because I am usually very tired from the week, and I stay up later than usual on Friday night. I also like to take long walks in the park with my family and our dog, Jake. Saturdays are great!

***Example 2***

**Friends**

When I am with my friends, we have a great time. First of all, we like to laugh. We tell stories and laugh at all the silly parts of our stories. Sometimes we go shopping together. We might buy things, or we might just look around and window-shop. My friends and I also play games. Our favorite game is Pictionary, where we each have to draw pictures and the other people have to guess what it is. Finally, we like to rent movies or go out to a show. I’m so glad I have a few close friends to have fun with!

***Example 3***

**An Excellent Comedian**

Even though some people feel that Bill Cosby is just another comedian, I can think of several reasons why he is not. First is the fact that Cosby doesn’t use any foul language. For some comedians, like Eddie Murphy and Andrew Dice Clay, foul language makes up almost their whole act. Bill Cosby uses only a couple “bad words”, and he still brings in big crowds when he performs. Along with this is his idea of using everyday situations for his humor. Cosby doesn’t make up jokes on anything, but brings out the humor in what happens to us all. One example of this is the way he talks about the dentist and the “little toilet” that we all have to spit in. Bill Cosby also uses excellent body and facial expressions. When he talks about gin, vodka, and beer drinkers, he can imitate them and make it look very realistic. Clearly, with his different style, Bill Cosby is as good if not better than most of the popular comedians today.

**Explain, Explain, Explain**

Nothing is more important than the quantity and quality of the explanations you include in your writing. You can have a wonderful topic sentence and choose the best transitions, but if you don’t support the explain the topic, your paragraph will fail.

In the following example paragraphs:

* The key/main points are underlined.
* The *explanations* are in *italics*.

**Example 1**

**Keeping Clean**

Creatures of all sizes find ways to keep themselves clean. Large animals like elephants go to rivers to cool off and clean up. *After bathing in the cool water, the elephant powders itself. Elephants use dust as powder to keep the bugs from biting*. Rabbits also take time to clean. *They often lick their ears and scrub them to keep them clean*. Finally, little creatures like birds enjoy bathing in puddles. *When they finish, they comb their feathers. This is called preening*. Bathtime, it seems, is not just for you and me.

**Example 2**

**Facts About the Holocaust**

Although I learned some things about the Holocaust when I read the *Diary of Anne Frank*, I learned even more when listening to the interview with Mr. Sayone. First of all, in the camp that Mr. Sayone went to, the 18-30 year old people were separated from those who were younger or older. *The Nazis wanted those people to work in the fields. The others were killed right away because they were considered too young or old to work*. Second, I learned that if anyone did survive, they were lucky if others in the family survived. *Unless they were able to escape, all the prisoners were killed, especially when it seemed the allies would be coming to help*. Finally, Mr. Sayone explained that not all of the prisoners were killed with guns or gas. *Many of them died from starvation or disease*. Certainly, this interview tape taught me a lot about this horrible event in history.

**Tips for Writing Conclusions**

“A conclusion is a place where you get tired of thinking” – Jokeline, *Rocky Mountain News*

Not every paragraph needs a formal conclusion, but you cannot just stop because you are tired. The reader needs to know that you are finished your main points and supporting ideas.

***Consider these tips:***

* Restate your position – remind readers of your topic
* Don’t just copy the topic sentence again. Use different word order and synonyms.
* If it fits, try to use one of these words in your final sentence:

all in all in conclusion to sum up certainly

clearly in fact truly obviously

definitely surely to conclude in summary

As you can see

Try to avoid these phrases. They are used too much!!

* As you can see
* As I have said

To focus your conclusion, you need to do one of these:

* *Summarize* your paragraph
* *Convince* the reader of your position
* *Challenge* them to think about the issue
* *Encourage* them to take action

Most importantly, change your sentence structure for your conclusion. If your topic sentence was a power statement, use an occasion/position statement for the end. If your topic sentence was an and/but/or statement, use a simple sentence for the ending.

***Examples of topic sentences and conclusions:***

*Topic sentence*: My new car alarm was a source of embarrassment three times during this past week. (Power Statement)

*Conclusion*: Even though I was frustrated by each of these situations, I’ll keep the alarm because of the safety it provides. (Occasion/Position)

*Topic sentence*: Although it isn’t against the law in Alberta, I believe people should not drive with cellphones. (Occasion/Position)

*Conclusion*: Cellphone use in the car just isn’t right, and it’s up to us to stop it! (and, but,or)

*Topic sentence*: In 2010, I will do two things differently. (Power)

*Conclusion*: In conclusion, I promise to keep up with these resolutions I have made. (simple)

*Topic sentence*: Although I did not know much about the flood of ’93, I know a few things after reading many articles on this topic. (Occasion/Position)

*Conclusion*: The flood has certainly had an effect on the people and the environment. (simple)

**Example Paragraphs with Good Conclusions:**

**Example 1**

**Computers**

During the last three years I have learned several things of taking care of a computer. First, I learned the proper way to turn the computer on and off. Next, my teachers have taught me how to put in and correctly take out a USB key. I also know how to save all my files on the USB and not destroy files that are on the hard drive. Most importantly, I can now use a keyboard correctly. In fact, I have learned these things so well that I have taught my friend how to use the computer.

**Example 2**

**Spare Time**

When I have spare time, I always ride my bike. Riding my bike is good exercise. It gets my heart pumping and strengthens my muscles. It also gives me a chance to get some fresh air. As I ride, I relax and enjoy being outside. Sometimes I ride alone, and sometimes I ride with friends. Spending time on my bike is truly my favorite activity.