

Get to the Point: Topic Sentences

If a paragraph is an iceberg, the topic sentence is the visible portion above water. While much smaller than the mass underneath, the topic sentence is what the audience will see first and remember most. Ignoring topic sentences in the north Atlantic could also lead to a maritime tragedy of unprecedented proportions. Topic sentences, therefore, should be strong and impactful.

Location is Everything

Topic sentences are usually the first sentence of a paragraph. If they are not the first, then they should be the second. If the sentence that best captures the idea of the paragraph is the last sentence, consider moving it to the beginning.

Preview the Paragraph

The topic sentence should serve as a preview for the rest of the paragraph and give the reader a sense of what the paragraph is about without even reading it.

Make a Claim

Think of the topic sentence as a claim that the paragraph will prove. The topic sentence should be more than simply the first sentence you wrote in a paragraph.

Brief is Best

Try to keep topic sentences to the point. Long, circuitous topic sentences often obscure more than they reveal. For this reason, avoid trying to make a claim and defend it in the same sentence.

Save Description for Later

Basic introductory information is perfect for sentences in the body. For example, the date, location, and size of an important political meeting does not need to be in a topic sentence that states why that meeting mattered.

Find the Right Order

Compare these sentences:

Sentence 1: Mohandas K. Gandhi's mobilization of India's masses brought the problems of common people to the centerstage of Indian politics.

Sentence 2: Gandhi regularly visited rural India during the early twentieth century.

Sentence 3: Thousands flocked to train stations to catch glimpse of Gandhi when he arrived.

Sentence 1 tells the reader why Gandhi and his movement mattered. While Gandhi's travel plans are plenty interesting, *Sentence 2* does not tell us why his travels were significant. Although *Sentence 3* describes the crowds he attracted, it does not tell the reader why the crowds mattered. Thus, *Sentence 1* is the best candidate for topic sentence of these three.