TOPIC SENTENCES AND DEVELOPMENT OF PARAGRAPHS

Most paragraphs contain one main idea to which all the sentences relate. The topic sentence states this main idea and is usually written first in the paragraph. Topic sentences serve key roles in a paragraph:

- Topic sentences explain what the paragraph is about.
- Topic sentences make a general statement supported by the rest of the paragraph
- Topic sentences indicate the kind of detail readers should expect in the paragraph
- Topic sentences dramatize a writer's main points, making writing easier to read and remember.

Read the following paragraph and underline the topic sentence.

Revenue sharing has benefited professional football, allowing NFL teams to flourish in smaller cities. Unlike baseball, basketball, and hockey, professional football teams share money generated by national television and memorabilia sales. Currently each team receives some 100 million annually, allowing teams in smaller cities like Green Bay and Minneapolis to compete with teams in major markets like New York and Chicago. As a result, NFL teams are more balanced, having the funds to hire players and invest in team development and coaching. Other sports, which suffer declining ticket sales and dwindling profits in smaller media markets, may consider moving to revenue sharing to keep teams competitive and maintain fan interest.

Each group of sentences below can be arranged and written as a paragraph. Circle the letter of the sentence that would be the best topic sentence.

Example:

a. Speed-walking three times a week is part of my routine

b. Staying healthy and fit is important to me.

c. Every night I get at least eight hours of sleep.

d. I eat as many fresh fruits and vegetables as possible.

1. a. Some colleges are experimenting with using iPods to deliver instructional material, complete with musical clips, news, and even video.

b. Runners, hikers and bicyclists sometimes use their iPods as personal trainers that plan a route and then provide maps, distances, and time goals.

c. Although most people still think of the iPod as a digital music player, others are using these gadgets in creative and innovative ways.

d. Video iPod owners can search for their soul mates using PodDater software to download short video clips and profiles of available singles.
2. a. Trained bomb-sniffing dogs have a nearly perfect record of separating real explosives from false alarms.

b. Most air travelers love these dogs, prompting one police officer to say that people react to his Labrador retriever, Chili, as if she were Julia Roberts.

c. Bomb-sniffing dogs have become an important and often-beloved security safeguard at airports.

d. Because dogs are mobile – unlike machines – they can easily lead their handlers to the source of a problem.

3. a. When his family moved to Los Angeles in 1974, ten-year-old Lenny won a place in the California Boys Choir and taught himself to play many instruments.

b. As a teen, he studied music at the Berkeley Hills School and created the dramatic look for which he is now famous.

c. Before he was ten, he had convinced his parents to take him to concerts by James Brown, Duke Ellington, and the Jackson 5.

d. Lenny and his father produced his first album which won him a record contact and huge numbers of fans.

e. A childhood love of performing music launched rocker and songwriter Lenny Kravitz on the path to stardom.

f. As a toddler I Brooklyn, New York, Lenny made his own drum set out of pots and pans.

4. a. Physical courage allows soldiers or athletes to endure bodily pain or danger.

b. Those with social courage dare to expose their deep feelings in order to build close relationships.

c. Those rare people who stand up for their beliefs despite public pressure possess moral courage.

d. Inventors and artists show creative courage when they break out of old ways of seeing and doing things.

e. Psychologist Roll May claims that there are four different types of courage.

5. a. She watched her mother and father, who had only an elementary school education, struggle to feed and clothe the family.

b. Today, Aguilera is president of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) which supports Hispanic students with scholarships and internships.

c. For Esther Aguilera, education is the key that unlocks the American dream.

d. Esther became an excellent student, earned her bachelor’s degree in public policy, and decided to help other Hispanics aim high and succeed in college.

e. Born in Mexico, five-year-old Esther arrived in California with her parents and five siblings.
6. a. Many old toys and household objects are now collectors' items.

b. A Barbie or Madame Alexander doll from the 1950s can bring more than $1,000.

c. Old baseball cards are worth money to collectors.

d. Fiesta china, made in the 1930s, has become popular again.

Paragraphs should be developed through the use of examples, facts, statistics, quotes and paraphrased material. Do not use supporting statements that simply restate the topic sentence. Details should directly support the topic sentence, not introduce new or irrelevant ideas.

Read the following paragraph carefully and underline the topic sentence; then cross out sentences that do not support the controlling idea.

The Internet has increased the amount of information students can access, but it has not made them smarter. Today a student in a small remote school can easily log on and obtain information from the most famous and well-stocked libraries in the world. The Internet lets people order clothes, invest in stocks, and buy airline tickets without leaving home. Despite all this information flashing on their computer screens, students are not getting much of an improved education. Education is essential for our children to get good jobs in a high-tech world and global economy. There is a lot of adult material on the Internet that endangers children as well. The problem with the Internet is that it just provides raw data. Students need to develop skills to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and compare sources. They need sophisticated intellectual skills to make use of all the data at their fingertips. Schools and parents don’t always fact the fact that the Internet spews out information. It does not teach students how to think.

COHERENCE

Sentences in a paragraph should be logically related with solid and strong connections. Coherence between ideas can be aided by using transitional words and repetition of key words. Use a mode of developing the paragraph, such as example, cause and effect, or comparison.

Place the sentences below in the correct order from 1-12 to create a well written paragraph with coherence.

_____ Nobody wants to be a misfit; everyone needs to feel accepted and valued by others.

_____ Without that kind of group acceptance, one is likely to lead a lonely, isolated life.

_____ A set of values, acceptance, and unconditional love are a few of the most important benefits.

_____ To them, a gang seems almost like a family.

_____ Family or friends provide an extremely important group identity of most people.

_____ A sports team offers many of the same rewards, and so does a club or a Scout troop.

_____ In return, the family also gives individuals something.

_____ A group offers a sense of security and belonging to all its members.

_____ Although none of us can choose the family that we are born into, all of us need to choose our other group memberships wisely.

_____ Unfortunately, some young people today find their group identity in a gang.

_____ For example, sisters, brothers, and cousins all feel a sense of belonging to the same family, and thus they generally remain loyal to the family unit.

_____ Many people are members of several different groups in addition to their family.
UNITY

A paragraph with unity is like a completed puzzle. Every piece is necessary, and each does its part to contribute to the big picture. Each sentence must support the topic sentence. When a sentence or sentences do not fit, the paragraph lacks unity.

Read the paragraph below and find the three sentences that interfere with the unity of the paragraph.

I have heard that inside every fat person there is a thin person waiting to get out, but I believe that just the opposite is true. Inside every thin person, a fat person is waiting to take control. For most people, maintaining thinness requires self-control at mealtime. A thin person may avoid second helpings of fried chicken and load up on salad instead. But somewhere inside, an inner, fat self is craving ice cream with chocolate sauce for dessert. Staying thin also requires exercise. The thin person may have plans to attend a Pilates class after work, but the fat person inside would rather curl up in front of a fire with a book and a cup of hot cocoa. The thin person who gets up at 5:30 A.M. to jog has to silence the fat self’s unhappy voice, which is whining for just an extra half-hour’s sleep. Of course, thin people are better off staying thin. Studies have shown that in general, people who eat less live longer. In addition, people who exercise are healthier and more likely to maintain flexibility and mobility into old age. All it would take is a moment of weakness for the fat person inside to burst forth, no longer held in by the tight cocoon of thinness.

DEVELOPMENT

Paragraphs need a strong topic sentence with several sentences supporting the main idea. Use specific examples to improve the development of the following paragraph.

Visiting Disney World can be lots of fun. It is a neat place to go to see with many activities for all ages of people. I had a great time when I went there last year. I never thought I would have a chance to go see so many different rides and exhibits. I really recommend a trip to Disney World if you are looking for an awesome vacation spot.