

# TS1 - Paragraph Construction

**The Topic Sentence:** A topic sentence is usually the first sentence of a formal academic paragraph. Not only is a topic sentence the first sentence, but, more importantly, it is the most general sentence in a paragraph. What does "most general" mean? It means that there are not many details in the sentence, but that the sentence introduces an overall idea that you want to discuss later in the paragraph.

For example, suppose that you want to write a paragraph about the natural landmarks of your hometown. The first part of your paragraph might look like the one below. However, the TOPIC sentence is missing:

“ \_\_\_\_\_ . *First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful. Also, on the other side of the town is Wheaton Hill, which is unusual because it is very steep.*”

Note how the first sentence (which you have supplied!) is the most general statement. This sentence is different from the two sentences that follow it, since the second and third sentences mention specific details about the town's geography, and are not general statements.

What do you think about the following topic sentences?

- 1 “*My hometown is famous because it is located by Wheaton River, which is very wide, and because it is built near an unusually steep hill called Wheaton Hill.*”
- 2 “*There are two reasons why some people like to buy cars with automatic transmission and two reasons why others like cars with manual transmission.*”
- 3 “*Clouds are white.*”

**Supporting Sentences:** Consider again the above-mentioned, short paragraph:

“*My hometown, Wheaton, is famous for several amazing natural features. First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful. Also, on the other side of the town is Wheaton Hill, which is unusual because it is very steep.*”

When a reader reads a topic sentence, a question should usually appear in the reader's mind. In this case, the question should be like, “*What are the natural features that make Wheaton famous?*” The reader should then expect that the rest of the paragraph will give an answer to this question.

Now look at the sentences after the topic sentence. We can see that the second sentence in the paragraph: “*First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful.*” indeed gives an answer to this question. That is, the second sentence gives some explanation for the fact that Wheaton is a famous town. Similarly, we can see that the third sentence also gives some explanation for the fact that Wheaton is famous by giving another example of an “amazing natural feature,” in this case, Wheaton Hill.

The second and third sentences are supporting sentences; they support - or explain - the idea expressed in the topic sentence. Of course, paragraphs in English often have more than two supporting ideas. The paragraph above is actually a very short paragraph. Here we can see our paragraph about Wheaton with a few more supporting sentences:

“*My hometown is famous for several amazing natural features. First, it is noted for the Wheaton River, which is very wide and beautiful. Also, on the other side of the town is Wheaton Hill, which is unusual because it is very steep. The third amazing feature is the Big Old Tree. This tree stands two hundred feet tall and is probably about six hundred years old.*”