

The Topic Sentence

The controlling idea of a body paragraph is usually expressed in a **topic sentence**. This sentence may occur at the beginning of the body paragraph and is a generalized statement about the paragraph's content. All other sentences within the paragraph must support the **topic sentence** and contribute to the paragraph's unity.

On occasion, sentences within a paragraph may be so unified and focused that a **topic sentence** generalizing the paragraph's content is unnecessary. Also, in the case where a previous **topic sentence** seems to adequately generalize the content of a subsequent paragraph, the **topic sentence** is unnecessary. Paragraphs that are narrative or descriptive may not require a **topic sentence**.

There are a number of alternatives to the **topic sentence** that generalizes the paragraph's content. Alternatives may be

- a statement that contradicts the rest of the paragraph's sentences
- a quotation that will eventually be explained or developed by the paragraph's remaining sentences
- a question that the paragraph's remaining sentences will answer.

