

Writing Topic Sentences Lesson Plan and Notes

Common Core Standards

Teaching topic sentences satisfies the following common core standards.

- **W.9-10.1a** Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- **W.9-10.3a** Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
- **W.9-10.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

What is a Topic Sentence?

Start by discussing the following. You may want to have students copy this information before they do the assignment.

The **topic sentence** contains the central idea around which a paragraph is developed. A good one has the following six characteristics:

1. It introduces the topic of a paragraph without announcing it.
2. It hooks the reader.
3. It plants questions in the readers' mind.
4. It uses thought-provoking words.
5. It is usually the first sentence; however, it can occur anywhere in the paragraph or it can be implied.
6. It provides a transition from the previous paragraph.

Not all topic sentences will contain every single characteristic. A writer should strive for the ideal; the ideal, however, is not always ideal.

Topic Sentence Lesson Plan

Start with some examples. You can use student generated sentences or use these.

Original: Columbus was an explorer in the 1400s.

Revision: Travel has changed since the days of Columbus.

Original: People waste time

Revision: Some pass time moving from one incomplete task to another, spending too little time with loved ones, investing too little time in physical and mental self-improvement, and trading water financially.

Original: I don't like diapers even though I love my children.

Revision: I love my children, but I hate changing their poopy diapers (especially when my dog runs off with it), but there's one diaper I didn't mind changing; ironically, it was the most difficult diaper-change ever, requiring 17 wipes and a blow torch.

Original: I had a very bright student long ago.

Revision: Even linguistically gifted leaders struggle with self-esteem

Assignment #1

1. Hand out the chart below with the topic sentences filled in. Instruct students to complete the assignment.
2. Discuss their findings. Answers may vary. It's up to the teacher to clarify what constitutes a satisfactory requirement. I included a key that includes what my answers would look like.
3. Optional: After students are finished with the hand out, organize groups of four to discuss their revised sentences, perhaps choosing the best ones for class discussion.
4. Write revised examples on the board and discuss why the revised sentence is an improvement or not an improvement.

Assignment #2

1. Students will need a recently written essay or essays.
2. Instruct them to highlight topic sentences.
3. Use the handout for students to record their topic sentences and to identify its effectiveness.
4. Revise topic sentences.
5. Optional: Discuss in small groups the effectiveness of individual revisions.
6. Write revisions on the board and discuss strengths and weaknesses of the revision. Be sure to compare it to the original for maximum learning.

Directions: A good topic sentence satisfies some or all of the following qualities: (1) It introduces the topic of a paragraph without announcing it; (2) It hooks the reader; (3) It plants questions in the reader’s mind; (4) It uses thought-provoking words. (5) It is usually the first sentence (it can occur anywhere in the paragraph or it can be implied); (6) It provides a transition from the previous paragraph. **In the left hand column is a topic sentence. Put an ‘x’ in each column to the right if you think the topic sentence meets that requirement.**

Topic Sentence	Topic	Hook	Plants	Thought
Even if George Washington’s cherry-tree legend were true, it wouldn’t even merit mention in his 100 greatest accomplishments.				
Johnny Manziel was drafted by the Cleveland Browns.				
I am going to tell you about chipmunks.				
The Australian wombat instinctively aligns itself in groups of eight, which is bad news for the 9 th -born in a litter.				
I woke up with a massive headache and a pound of maggoty bratwurst smeared on my collar bone.				
Dogs make good pets.				
Egyptians mummified their kings.				
Things were looking up until the general manager panicked, got rid of the drive-thru guy, and hired a gourmet chef.				

Choose four of the above topic sentences and improve them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Key (Answers may vary): A good topic sentence satisfies some or all of the following qualities: (1) It introduces the topic of a paragraph without announcing it; (2) It hooks the reader; (3) It plants questions in the reader’s mind; (4) It uses thought-provoking words. (5) It is usually the first sentence (it can occur anywhere in the paragraph or it can be implied); (6) It provides a transition from the previous paragraph. In the left hand column is a topic sentence. Put an ‘x’ in each column to the right if you think the topic sentence meets that requirement.

Topic Sentence	Topic	Hook	Plants	Thought
Even if George Washington’s cherry-tree legend were true, it wouldn’t even merit mention in his 100 greatest accomplishments.	X	X	X	X
Johnny Manziel was drafted by the Cleveland Browns.	X			
I am going to tell you about chipmunks.				
The Australian wombat instinctively aligns itself in groups of eight, which is bad news for the 9th-born in a litter.	X	X	X	X
I woke up with a massive headache and a pound of maggoty bratwurst smeared on my collar bone.	X	X	X	X
Dogs make good pets.	X			
Egyptians mummified their kings.	X			X
Things were looking up until the general manager panicked, got rid of the drive-thru guy, and hired a gourmet chef.	X	X	X	X

Key (Answers will vary): Choose four of the above topic sentences and improve them.

1. Johnny Manziel’s party habits, lack of maturity, and inability to discipline himself led to the former Heisman Trophy winner’s draft position plummet.
2. Chipmunks can pack up to 33 pounds of acorns in their cheeks while walking on their tails.
3. Franklin Benitez owes his life to a 4-pound Chihuahua named Snickers.
4. Ancient Egyptians used a hook to extract the brain of soon-to-be mummified kings.

Directions: A good topic sentence satisfies some or all of the following qualities: (1) It introduces the topic of a paragraph without announcing it; (2) It hooks the reader; (3) It plants questions in the reader’s mind; (4) It uses thought-provoking words. (5) It is usually the first sentence (it can occur anywhere in the paragraph or it can be implied); (6) It provides a transition from the previous paragraph. **In the left hand column, write topic sentences from a recent essay. Put an ‘x’ in each column to the right if you think the topic sentence meets that requirement.**

Topic Sentence	Topic	Hook	Plants	Thought	Location	Transiti on

Choose four of the above topic sentences and improve them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.