

# Topics, Main Ideas, and Topic Sentences

## 3

### LEARNING GOALS

Learn how to . . .

- GOAL 1  
Structure a paragraph
- GOAL 2  
Identify and select topics
- GOAL 3  
Read and write topic sentences
- GOAL 4  
Think critically about topic sentences



### THINK About It!

Look at the photograph on this page. What do you see? Create a story or scenario in your mind. Then write a sentence describing what you think has happened.

The sentence you have written states the main point the photograph conveys. It expresses your view of what is happening. When others read the sentence you wrote, they understand your interpretation of the situation. They may agree or disagree with your view, but they will understand it. Both readers and writers, then, communicate and exchange ideas through the effective use of sentences that state a main point, which are called topic sentences.

## Reading and Writing Connections

### EVERYDAY CONNECTIONS



- **Writing** You are sending an e-mail to the technical support personnel of a computer manufacturer asking for help with a problem. Your **topic sentence** should directly state the problem.
- **Reading** As a support technician, you need to read an e-mail complaint or question and identify the customer's problem before you can provide assistance.

### ACADEMIC CONNECTIONS



- **Reading** You are reading a section of a sociology text titled "Communities: Goals and Structures." You try to find a paragraph that defines what a community is.
- **Writing** When answering an essay exam question for the same class, you are asked to briefly define and provide examples of a community. Your **topic sentence** should give a brief definition of *community*.

### WORKPLACE CONNECTIONS



- **Writing** You are the manager of a chain restaurant and must write an incident report for corporate headquarters about a theft that occurred on the premises. Your **topic sentence** should state the time, location, date, and item stolen.
- **Reading** As a director at corporate headquarters, you begin reading the report by looking for a sentence in the first paragraph that concisely states what happened.

## What Is a Paragraph?

### ■ GOAL 1

Structure a paragraph

A **paragraph** is a group of related sentences that develop a main thought, or idea, about a single topic. The structure of a paragraph is not complex. There are usually three basic elements: (1) a topic, (2) a topic sentence, and (3) supporting details. The **topic sentence** states the main, or controlling, idea. The sentences that explain this main point are called **supporting details**. These details may be facts, reasons, or examples that provide further information about the topic sentence.

As a writer, these paragraph elements provide you with an easy-to-follow structure for expressing your ideas clearly and effectively. As a reader, these same elements help you know what to look for and ensure that you will understand and remember what you read. This chapter will show you how to identify topics and topic sentences as you read, how to select topics to write about, and how to write clear and concise topic sentences. Chapters 4–6 will show you how to recognize key details as you read and how to provide and organize details as you write.

## EXAMINING PROFESSIONAL WRITING

The author of the following article has written several books on the link between diet and health. In the article, he examines a new partnership between a famous fried chicken restaurant chain and a breast cancer advocacy group. This article will be used in this chapter as a model of professional writing and to illustrate the reading techniques discussed.

### Thinking Before Reading

Before you read do the following:

1. Preview the reading, using the steps discussed in Chapter 1, page 4.
2. Connect the reading to your own experience by answering the following questions:
  - a. How often do you eat fast food? Are you concerned about the effects of fast food on your health?
  - b. What do you already know about Susan G. Komen for the Cure?
3. Mark and annotate as you read.

1400L/1066 words

## Greed, Cancer, and Pink KFC Buckets

John Robbins

### grassroots

involving ordinary people at a local or community level

- 1 We live in a world of profound contradictions. Some things are just unbelievably strange. At times I feel like I've found a way to adapt to the weirdness of the world, and then along comes something that just boggles my mind. It is ironic that the largest **grassroots** breast cancer advocacy group in the world, a group called "Susan G. Komen for the Cure," has now partnered with the fast food chain KFC, known for its high-fat foods and questionable treatment of its chickens, in a national "Buckets for the Cure" campaign. The program began last month and runs through the end of May.
- 2 KFC is taking every chance it can manufacture to trumpet the fact that it will donate 50 cents to Komen for every pink bucket of chicken sold. For its part, Komen is announcing on its website that "KFC and Susan G. Komen for the Cure are teaming up . . . to . . . spread educational messaging via a major national campaign which will reach thousands of communities served by nearly 5,000 KFC restaurants."
- 3 Educational messaging, indeed. How often do you think this "messaging" provides information about the critical importance a healthy diet plays in maintaining a healthy weight and preventing cancer? How often do you think it refers in any way to the many studies that, according to the National Cancer Institute's website, "have shown that an increased risk of developing colorectal, pancreatic, and breast cancer is associated with high intakes of well-done, fried or barbecued meats"? If you guessed zero, you're right.



**egregious**

outrageously bad

**pinkwashing**

using support for breast cancer research to sell products, especially products that can be linked with cancer

4 Meanwhile, the American Institute for Cancer Research reports that 60 to 70 percent of all cancers can be prevented with lifestyle changes. Their number one dietary recommendation is to: "Choose predominantly plant-based diets rich in a variety of vegetables and fruits, legumes and minimally processed starchy staple foods." Does that sound like pink buckets of fried chicken?

5 Pardon me for being cynical, but I have to ask, if Komen is going to partner with KFC, why not take it a step further and partner with a cigarette company? They could sell pink packages of cigarettes, donating a few cents from each pack while claiming "each pack you smoke brings us closer to the day cancer is vanquished forever."

6 Whose brilliant idea was it that buying fried chicken by the bucket is an effective way to fight breast cancer? One breast cancer advocacy group, Breast Cancer Action, thinks the Komen/KFC campaign is so **egregious** that they call it "**pinkwashing**," another sad example of commercialism draped in pink ribbons. "Make no mistake," they say, "every pink bucket purchase will do more to benefit KFC's bottom line than it will to cure breast cancer."

7 One thing is hard to dispute. In partnering with KFC, Susan G. Komen for the Cure has shown itself to be numbingly oblivious to the role of diet in cancer prevention. Of course it's not hard to understand KFC's motives. They want to look good. But recent publicity the company has been getting hasn't been helping. For one thing, the company keeps taking hits for the unhealthiness of its food. Just last month, when KFC came out with its new Double Down sandwiches, the products were derided by just about every public health organization for their staggering levels of salt, calories and artery-clogging fat.

8 Then there's the squeamish matter of the treatment of the birds who end up in KFC's buckets, pink or otherwise. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has an entire website devoted to what it calls Kentucky Fried Cruelty, but you don't have to be an animal activist to be horrified by how the company treats chickens, if you lift the veil of the company's PR and see what actually takes place.

9 When PETA sent investigators with hidden cameras into a KFC "Supplier of the Year" slaughterhouse in Moorefield, West Virginia, what they found was enough to make KFC choke on its own pink publicity stunts. Workers were caught on video stomping on chickens, kicking them and violently slamming them against floors and walls. Workers were also filmed ripping the animals' beaks off, twisting their heads off, spitting tobacco into their eyes and mouths, spray-painting their faces,

and squeezing their bodies so hard that the birds expelled feces—all while the chickens were still alive.

- 10 KFC, naturally, did everything they could to keep the footage from being aired, but their efforts failed. In fact, the video from the investigation ended up being broadcast by TV stations around the world, as well as on all three national evening news shows, *Good Morning America*, and every one of the major cable news networks. Plus, more than a million people subsequently watched the footage on PETA's website.
- 11 It wasn't just animal activists who condemned the fast food chain for the level of animal cruelty displayed at KFC's "Supplier of the Year" slaughterhouse. Dr. Temple Grandin, perhaps the meat industry's leading farmed-animal welfare expert, said, "The behavior of the plant employees was atrocious." Dr. Ian Duncan, a University of Guelph professor of applied **ethology** and an original member of KFC's own animal-welfare advisory council, wrote, "This tape depicts scenes of the worst cruelty I have ever witnessed against chickens . . . and it is extremely hard to accept that this is occurring in the United States of America."
- 12 KFC claims, on its website, that its animal-welfare advisory council "has been a key factor in formulating our animal welfare program." But Dr. Duncan, along with five other former members of this advisory council, say otherwise. They all resigned in disgust over the company's refusal to take animal welfare seriously. Adele Douglass, one of those who resigned, said in an SEC filing reported on by the *Chicago Tribune* that KFC "never had any meetings. They never asked any advice, and then they touted to the press that they had this animal-welfare advisory committee. I felt like I was being used."
- 13 You can see why KFC would be eager to jump on any chance to improve its public image, and why the company would want to capitalize on any opportunity to associate itself in the public mind with the fight against breast cancer. What's far more mystifying is why an organization with as much public trust as Susan G. Komen for the Cure would jeopardize public confidence in its authenticity. As someone once said, it takes a lifetime to build a reputation, but only 15 minutes to lose it.

### ethology

the branch of zoology that studies the behavior of animals in their natural habitats

## Examining a Paragraph

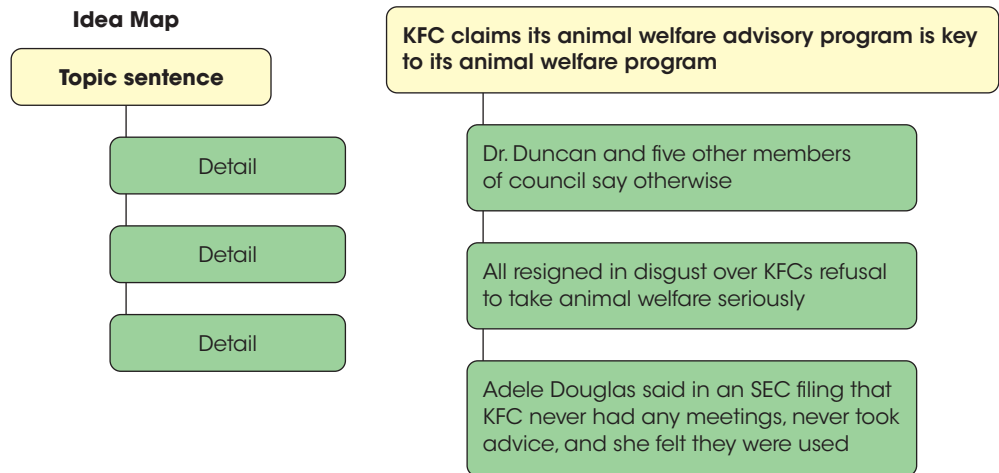
Read the following paragraph from "Cancer, Greed, and Pink KFC Buckets," noticing how all the details relate to one point and explain the topic sentence, which is highlighted. The topic sentence identifies the topic as *animal welfare* and states that KFC claims its animal welfare advisory council is key to its animal welfare program.

KFC claims, on its website, that its animal-welfare advisory council "has been a key factor in formulating our animal welfare program." But Dr. Duncan, along with five other former members of this advisory council, say otherwise. They all resigned in disgust over the company's refusal to take animal welfare seriously. Adele Douglass, one of those who resigned, said in an SEC filing reported on by the *Chicago Tribune* that KFC "never had any meetings. They never asked any advice, and then they touted to the press that they had this animal-welfare advisory committee. I felt like I was being used."

You can think about and visualize paragraph structure as shown on the left and the structure of this particular paragraph as shown on the right,



**VISUALIZE IT!**



Notice how well the topic sentence and details in the above paragraph work together to develop a main idea. The more general topic sentence is explained by the more specific details. You might ask, “How can I tell what is ‘general’ and what is ‘specific’ when I am reading?” Here are a few examples that are drawn from the professional reading. The first two use short topics and details; the last two use topic sentences and detail sentences.

<b>GENERAL</b>	birds
<b>SPECIFIC</b>	chickens, cardinals, robins
<b>GENERAL</b>	fast food restaurants
<b>SPECIFIC</b>	Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's
<b>GENERAL</b>	KFC tried to stop PETA footage of chickens being mistreated from being aired.
<b>SPECIFIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The video was broadcast around the world and on all three national evening shows.</li> <li>■ More than a million people subsequently watched the footage on PETA's site.</li> </ul>
<b>GENERAL</b>	Other people beside animal activists condemned KFC for animal cruelty.
<b>SPECIFIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dr. Temple Grandin said the workers behavior was atrocious.</li> <li>■ Dr. Ian Duncan said the tape showed the worst cruelty to chickens that he had ever witnessed.</li> </ul>

Notice that in each of these examples, the specific points explain the general by giving examples, reasons, or further information. In the same way, supporting details in a paragraph explain or support a topic sentence.

Now that you have seen how specific details are used to support topic sentences, practice distinguishing between general and specific.

## EXERCISE 3-1

## Using General and Specific Terms

**Directions:** For each list of items, select the choice that best describes that grouping.

- b**   1. for money, for experience, to meet people  
     a. reasons to attend a party  
     b. reasons to get a part-time job  
     c. reasons to apply for loans  
     d. reasons to date
- c**   2. U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, Federalist Papers, Twenty-Fifth Amendment  
     a. policies  
     b. historical events  
     c. historical documents  
     d. party politics
- d**   3. Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury  
     a. asteroids  
     b. solar systems  
     c. galaxies  
     d. planets



## NEED TO KNOW

## Important Terms

**Paragraph:** a group of sentences that focus on a single idea

**Topic:** the one thing a paragraph is about

**Topic sentence:** the sentence that tells what the paragraph is about

**Supporting details:** those sentences that explain the topic sentence

## Identifying and Selecting Topics

## ■ GOAL 2

Identify and select topics

Topics are important to both readers and writers. Identifying the topic of a paragraph helps readers to understand what it is about. Choosing focused topics helps writers focus their thoughts and organize their ideas.

## Reading: Locating the Topic of a Paragraph

You already know that the topic is the general subject of an entire paragraph. Every sentence in a paragraph in some way discusses or explains this topic. To find the topic of a paragraph, ask yourself: What is the one idea the author is discussing throughout the paragraph? Read the following paragraph with that question in mind:

When PETA sent investigators with hidden cameras into a KFC “Supplier of the Year” slaughterhouse in Moorefield, West Virginia, what they found was enough to make KFC choke on its own pink publicity stunts. Workers were caught on video stomping on chickens, kicking them and violently slamming them against floors and walls. Workers were also filmed ripping the animals’ beaks off, twisting their heads off, spitting tobacco into their eyes and mouths, spray-painting their faces, and squeezing their bodies so hard that the birds expelled feces—all while the chickens were still alive.

In this example, the writer is discussing one topic—the mistreatment of chickens in KFC slaughterhouses—throughout the paragraph. Notice that words related to mistreatment—*stomping*, *kicking*, *slamming*, *twisting*, *spitting*, and *squeezing*—provide clues to the topic. Writers often repeat key words or use related words to discuss and emphasize their main point.

## EXERCISE 3-2

## Reading: Locating Topics

**Directions:** After reading each of the following paragraphs, select the choice that best represents the topic of the paragraph.

- d     1. You've probably heard that older men die before older women virtually everywhere in the world. In the United States, women are expected to live an average of 80.4 years, while men live only 75.2 years. Sociologists attribute many factors to this trend. For example, men have higher testosterone levels than women, which may make men more likely to abuse alcohol and tobacco, drive aggressively, and engage in other life-threatening behaviors. Men also choose riskier types of work and become involved in wartime aggression, which are connected to men's decreased life expectancy. Studies also show that women are less likely to experience life-threatening illnesses and health problems than men are.
- Carl, *Think Sociology*, p. 211
- a. women's health  
b. men and risky behaviors  
c. testosterone and age  
d. men's life expectancy
- c     2. Many people look back to the 1950s as the golden age of the traditional family, but was it really? Teenage pregnancy rates were higher in the 1950s than they are today, although a higher proportion of teenage mothers were married (primarily due to "shotgun weddings," a colloquialism that developed from the idea that many fathers of pregnant girls had to force, possibly with a weapon, a man to marry his daughter once she became pregnant). Many families were unable to survive the traumas of war and its aftermath, and the divorce rate rose from one in six in 1940 to one in four marriages in 1946. Although many families prospered in the years following World War II, many others suffered from economic hardship. In 1948, *Newsweek* reported that most of the 27 million schoolchildren in the United States were badly in need of medical or dental care, while more than 900 thousand children were malnourished.
- Kunz, *THINK Marriages & Families*, p. 8
- a. teenage pregnancy rates  
b. the effect of war on divorce  
c. family problems in the 1950s  
d. golden age
- a     3. In the past few years, social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter have become hugely popular across all ages. Despite the opinions of some that young people are in danger of turning into crouching androids glued to their computers, research shows that



the majority of friendships are still maintained offline. Offline friendships are characterized by more interdependence, depth, understanding, and commitment, but online friendships can gain some of these qualities with time. Most online friends tend to be rather cautious about disclosing personal information. However, this does not apply to people with a negative view of themselves and others; they instead seem to share more information, possibly in an attempt to become more self-confident in their interactions. Interestingly, even in online friendships people seem to gain more satisfaction when befriending people of a similar age and place of residence.

—Kunz, *THINK Marriages & Families*, p. 82

- a. offline vs. online friendships
- b. technology and self-image
- c. personal information sharing online
- d. satisfaction in online friendships

b

4. A century ago politicians used to say, "Vote early and often." Cases such as West Virginia's 159,000 votes being cast by 147,000 eligible voters in 1888 were not that unusual. Largely to prevent corruption associated with stuffing ballot boxes, states adopted voter registration laws around the turn of the century, which require individuals to first place their name on an electoral roll in order to be allowed to vote. Although these laws have made it more difficult to vote more than once, they have also discouraged some people from voting at all. Voter registration requirements in the United States are, in part, to blame for why Americans are significantly less likely to go to the polls than citizens of other democratic nations.

—Edwards et al., *Government in America*, p. 313

- a. voter turnout
- b. voter registration
- c. voter eligibility
- d. voter fraud

a

5. Compared with the technical resources of a theater of today, those of a London public theater in the time of Queen Elizabeth I seem hopelessly limited. Plays had to be performed by daylight, and scenery had to be kept simple: a table, a chair, a throne, perhaps an artificial tree or two to suggest a forest. But these limitations were, in a sense, advantages. What the theater of today can spell out for us realistically, with massive scenery and electric lighting, Elizabethan playgoers had to imagine and the playwright had to make vivid for them by means of language. Not having a lighting technician to work a panel, Shakespeare had to indicate the dawn by having Horatio, in *Hamlet*, say in a speech rich in metaphor and descriptive detail:

But look, the morn in russet mantle clad  
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.

—Kennedy and Gioia, *Literature*, p. 1243

- a. impact of technological limitations on Elizabethan theater
- b. benefits of modern technology in theater performances
- c. effects of Shakespeare's writing style
- d. the use of language to make ideas vivid

## Writing: Selecting a Topic

The first step in writing an effective paragraph is to select a topic that you are knowledgeable and comfortable writing about. It is worth spending time to think of possible topics and to discover what you know about each before making a selection and beginning to write. Chapter 2, pages 47–49 describes four techniques—freewriting, brainstorming, branching, and questioning—for generating ideas about a topic.

The student writer we will follow in this chapter, Kate Atkinson, was given an assignment to write an essay in response to an article about the US and Russian education systems. Once she had determined the main point of her essay, she worked on developing topics—main ideas—for each of her supporting paragraphs.

## EXAMINING STUDENT WRITING



A good way to learn to read and write essays is to study a model. By examining the student essay below by Kate Atkinson, you will learn how to narrow a topic and write clear and effective topic sentences. Throughout the rest of the chapter, we will refer to Kate's essay to illustrate techniques and strategies.

*Kate Atkinson is a student at Beloit College in Wisconsin, where she is studying sociology and Russian. Kate wrote this essay in response to an article in the Moscow News. Kate studied Russian during high school and used her study abroad experience in Russia in responding to the article.*

Title announces subject  
of essay

## The Russian and U.S. School Systems

Kate Atkinson

Introduction draws reader  
in by discussing ways Russia  
and U.S. view each other

- 1 Russia and the U.S. share a complex history riddled with conflict and mutual mistrust. In the years since the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union, the two countries have worked to set aside their differences but tension still simmers beneath the surface. Russia is still viewed by many Americans as remote, mysterious, and even dangerous. Similarly, Russians harbor both admiration and contempt for America's economic prowess and superpower status. One thing both countries have in common, however, is an excellent system of education and impressive literacy rates (both above ninety-nine percent). Writes Mark H. Teeter for the *Moscow News*, "Russians and Americans share a long tradition of dimly perceiving each other's societies, and recent developments on both countries' school fronts neatly illustrate this through-a-glass-darkly effect." **Though both systems are highly acclaimed, they are each as different as the countries they belong to.**

Thesis statement

First subject introduced:  
Russia and education

Topic sentence: school  
attendance in Russia

- 2 In Russia, primary and secondary school education is compulsory from around age seven to age fifteen, after which students either go on to vocational school, join the work force, or remain in secondary school for two more years in order to graduate and go on to higher education. This decision is usually not made by the student, but by a combination of factors including family standards and expectations, class,

and location. Students who come from a family of industrial workers, for example, will usually go on to become one themselves. Russian students specialize early on in school, and as a result they know from a young age what type of career they are headed for. In recent years, specialized schools called “gymnasias” have become increasingly common in which students can focus on subjects such as music and foreign languages.

Topic sentence: curriculum  
in Russia

3 The Russian Ministry of Education determines the curriculum, and as a result, all schools meet a certain national standard of education (Teeter). Along with the usual requirements, the Russian curriculum emphasizes oral communication, memorization, and recitation. Russian school children are well-versed in the poetry of the beloved poet Pushkin and can recite famous lines without hesitation.

Topic sentence: classroom  
conduct in Russia

4 In the Russian classroom, the code of conduct between students and teachers is formal and respectful. When a teacher enters the room at the beginning of class, all students hastily rise and wait for the teacher’s greeting. Personal relationships are discouraged and the teacher’s sole responsibility is to relay information to be memorized by the students.

Author switches to second  
topic: US and education

Topic sentence: attendance  
in US

5 In the U.S., students must attend school between the ages of six and seventeen, and after passing all required courses they graduate and either go on to higher education or join the military or work force. The number of students who go on to higher education has increased dramatically in the past decade as job opportunities have become more competitive and college degrees more accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. U.S. students have a vast network of private and public universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges at their fingertips and therefore, a great deal of choice in the course of their education.

Topic sentence:  
US curriculum

6 Unlike Russia, the United States does not have a country-level curriculum. Instead, independent city, state, and community boards determine curriculums, and each state has its own Department of Education (Teeter). The boards work closely with the schools they monitor and can work to tackle problems such as bullying more effectively than a national ministry. However, the flexibility in curriculum from state to state has led to some schools’ not meeting the national literacy standard, and issues such as what is an appropriate approach to sex education and whether to teach creation science versus evolution are widely debated (Teeter).

Topic sentence: classroom  
conduct in US

7 In general, American students have more freedom in the classroom and the student-teacher relationship is less rigid. Teachers are generally more tolerant of laid back behavior in class but often do not get the respect they deserve.

Conclusion: a final discussion  
of the two different systems

8 The similarities and differences in these two systems of education closely mirror the history and values of the countries themselves. Russia still clings to rigid national control and standards while the U.S. allows for more freedom in the learning exchange. Both countries could learn from the other and work to smooth out the wrinkles in their acclaimed systems. In order for this to happen however, the two super powers would have to put the past aside and work to perceive each other through less biased lenses.

### Works Cited

Teeter, Mark H. “Schools of Hard Knocks.” *themoscownews*. Moscow News, 29 Mar. 2010. Web. 26 Feb. 2011.

## Writing: Refining Your Topic

To write a good paragraph, you need a manageable topic, one that is the right size. Your topic must be general enough to allow you to add interesting details that will engage your reader. It must also be specific or narrow enough that you can cover it adequately in a few sentences. If your topic is too general, you will end up with a few unrelated details that do not add up to a specific point. If your topic is too narrow, you will not have enough to say.

Suppose you have decided to write a paragraph about sports. Here is your topic.

sports as a favorite activity for many people

This topic is much *too broad* to cover in one paragraph. Think of all the different aspects you could write about. Which sports would you consider? Would you write about both playing sports and watching them? Would you write about both professional and amateur sports? Would you write about the reasons people enjoy sports? The topic must be more specific:

watching professional football on Sunday afternoons with my family

Here you have limited your topic to a specific sport (football), a specific time (Sunday afternoon), and some specific fans (your family).

Here are other examples of topics that are too general. Each has been revised to be more specific.

<b>TOO GENERAL</b>	Influence of my parents
<b>REVISED</b>	Influence of my parents on my choice of college
<b>TOO GENERAL</b>	Sex education
<b>REVISED</b>	How sex education in high school helps students talk more openly

If your topic is *too specific* (narrow), you will not have enough details to use in a paragraph, or you may end up including details that do not relate directly to the topic. Suppose you decide to write a paragraph about the Internet and come up with this topic:

the role of the Internet in keeping me in touch with friends and family

What else would your paragraph say? You might name some specific friends and where they are, but this list would not be very interesting. This topic is too specific. It might work as a detail, but not as the main point of the paragraph. To correct the problem, ask, “What else does the Internet allow me to do?” You might say that it allows you to stay in touch with friends by e-mail, that it makes doing research for college papers easier, and that the World Wide Web has information on careers and even specific job openings. Here is a possible revised topic:

the Internet as an important part of my personal, college, and work life



Here are a few other examples of topics that are too narrow, along with revisions for each one:

<b>TOO NARROW</b>	voter participation
<b>REVISED</b>	Americans who do not exercise their right to vote
<b>TOO NARROW</b>	child-care leave
<b>REVISED</b>	flexible child-care leave policy at Markel Carpet Company

How can you tell if your topic is too general or too specific? Try brainstorming or branching to generate ideas. If you find you can develop the topic in many different directions, or if you have trouble choosing details from a wide range of choices, your topic is probably too general. If you cannot think of anything to explain or support it, your topic sentence is too specific.

After reading the assigned article on the Russian and US school systems and brainstorming for ideas, Kate decided to write about the similarities and differences between the two systems based on her experiences as a student in both (she attended Gymnasia #17 in Petrozavodsk as an exchange student in 10th grade).

Once she had determined the overall topic for her paper, she started working on the body paragraphs, brainstorming ideas to support her main point. Here are some of the paragraph topics she initially listed and her revisions to them:

<b>TOO NARROW:</b>	education compulsory from age seven to fifteen in Russia
<b>REVISED:</b>	educational paths for Russian students
<b>TOO BROAD:</b>	educational curriculum in US
<b>REVISED:</b>	US curriculum in contrast with Russian curriculum



### EXERCISE 3-3

## Writing: Narrowing Topics

**Directions:** Narrow or broaden each of the following topics so that it can be developed in a single paragraph.

1. Behavior of sports fans
2. Number of used cell phones discarded each year
3. Minority group discrimination on campus
4. Acreage destroyed by wildfires each year
5. procrastination

# Reading and Writing Topic Sentences

■ **GOAL 3**  
Read and write topic sentences

Once you know how to locate and develop a topic, you can easily locate and write topic sentences.

## Reading: Locating Topic Sentences

You learned earlier that the *topic sentence* of a paragraph is its most important point. It is also the most *general* statement the writer makes about the topic. Pick out the most general statement among the following sentences.

1. Animals differ according to when they sleep.
2. Some animals sleep during daylight while others sleep during darkness.
3. Animals' sleeping habits differ in a number of ways.
4. Hibernation is another kind of sleep for some animals.

Did you choose sentence 3 as the most general statement? Now we will change this list into a paragraph by rearranging the sentences and adding a few facts.

<sup>1</sup>Animals' sleeping habits differ in a number of ways. <sup>2</sup>They differ according to what time of day they sleep. <sup>3</sup>Some animals sleep during daylight hours while others sleep during darkness. <sup>4</sup>They also differ in the length of time they sleep. <sup>5</sup>Other animals sleep for weeks or months at a time when they hibernate.

In this brief paragraph, the topic sentence appears first in the paragraph. Notice that it is the most general statement in the paragraph. All the other sentences are specific details that explain it.

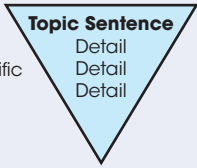
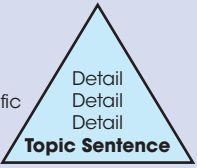
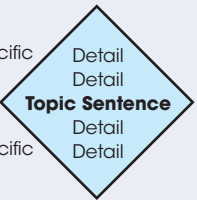
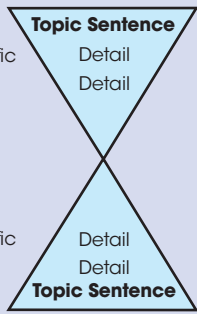
### Reading: Tips for Locating Topic Sentences

Here are some tips that will help you find topic sentences.

1. **Identify the topic.** As you did earlier, figure out the general subject of the entire paragraph. In the preceding sample paragraph, "animals' sleeping habits" is the topic.
2. **Locate the most general sentence (the topic sentence).** This sentence must be broad enough to include all of the other ideas in the paragraph. The topic sentence in the sample paragraph ("Animals' sleeping habits differ in a number of ways.") covers all of the other details in that paragraph.
3. **Study the rest of the paragraph.** The topic sentence must make the rest of the paragraph meaningful. It is the one idea that ties all of the other details together. In the sample paragraph, sentences 2, 3, 4, and 5 all give specific details about how animals' sleeping habits differ.

## Reading: Placement of Topic Sentences

Writers often place their topic sentence first in the paragraph—a position that enables the writer to state his or her main idea and then move on to explain it. The topic sentence can also be placed last or in the middle. On occasion a writer may choose to state the main idea once at the beginning of the paragraph and restate it at the end or use both sentences to fully explain his or her main idea. Although a topic sentence can be located anywhere in a paragraph, it is usually *first* or *last*.

Visual	Placement	Example
	<b>Topic Sentence First</b> Here the writer defines the term “focus group” and then provides details about focus groups.	<p>A focus group is a small group, usually consisting of about seven to ten people who are brought together to discuss a subject of interest to the researcher. Focus groups are commonly used today in business and politics; that flashy slogan you heard for a political campaign or a new toothpaste was almost certainly tested in a focus group to gauge people’s reactions. Social researchers may use a focus group to help design questions or instruments for quantitative research or to study the interactions among group members on a particular subject. In most cases, researchers ask predetermined questions, but the discussion is unstructured. Focus groups are a relatively cheap method of research and can be completed quickly. They also allow for the flexible discussions and answers that are desirable in qualitative research</p> <p>—Kunz, <i>THINK Marriages &amp; Families</i>, p.36</p>
	<b>Topic Sentence Last</b> Here the author discusses water as a limiting resource and concludes that water will become more limited throughout the 21st century.	<p>In the developing world 1.1 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water, 2.6 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation services, and more than 1.6 million deaths each year are traced to waterborne diseases (mostly in children under five). All too often in developing countries, water is costly or inaccessible to the poorest in society, while the wealthy have it piped into their homes. In addition, because of the infrastructure that is used to control water, whole seas are being lost, rivers are running dry, millions of people have been displaced to make room for reservoirs, groundwater aquifers are being pumped down, and disputes over water have raised tensions from local to international levels. Fresh water is a limiting resource in many parts of the world and is certain to become even more so as the 21st century unfolds.</p> <p>—Wright and Boorse, <i>Environmental Science</i>, p. 247</p>
	<b>Topic Sentence in Middle</b> Here the author discusses how one species nearly became extinct and concludes that government regulations are necessary to prevent this from happening again.	<p>In colonial days, huge flocks of snowy egrets inhabited the coastal wetlands and marshes of the southeastern United States. In the 1800s, when fashion dictated fancy hats adorned with feathers, egrets and other birds were hunted for their plumage. By the late 1800s, egrets were almost extinct. In 1886, the newly formed National Audubon Society began a press campaign to shame “feather wearers” and end the practice. The campaign caught on, and gradually, attitudes changed; new laws followed. Government policies that protect animals from overharvesting are essential to keep species from the brink of extinction. Even when cultural standards change due to the efforts of individual groups (such as the National Audubon Society), laws and policy measures must follow to ensure that endangered populations remain protected. Since the 1800s, several important laws have been passed to protect a wide variety of species.</p> <p>—Wright and Boorse, <i>Environmental Science: Toward a Sustainable Future</i>, p. 150</p>
	<b>Topic Sentence First and Last</b> The first and last sentences together explain that the NCI takes an aggressive strategy to finding and testing samples for cancer suppression.	<p>The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has taken a brute-force approach to screening species for cancer-suppressing chemicals. NCI scientists receive frozen samples of organisms from around the world, chop them up, and separate them into a number of extracts, each probably containing hundreds of components. These extracts are tested against up to 60 different types of cancer cells for their efficacy in stopping or slowing growth of the cancer. Promising extracts are then further analyzed to determine their chemical nature, and chemicals in the extract are tested singly to find the effective compound. This approach is often referred to as the “grind ‘em and find ‘em” strategy.</p> <p>—Belk and Maier, <i>Biology</i>, p. 334</p>

## EXERCISE 3-4

## Reading: Locating Topic Sentences

**Directions:** Underline the topic sentence in each of the following paragraphs.

1. The United States has a severe fire problem that if not addressed, will continue to worsen drastically. Fire statistics show that our nation, one of the richest and most technologically sophisticated countries in the world, lags behind its peer nations in fire security. Nationally, there are millions of fires, thousands of deaths, tens of thousands of injuries, and billions of dollars lost each year—figures which far exceed comparable statistics for other industrialized countries. In 2001, for example, the direct value of property destroyed in fires was \$11 billion (\$44 billion if the World Trade Center loss is included). More recently in 2004, direct property losses from fires were estimated at over \$9.8 billion.

—Loyd and Richardson, *Fundamentals of Fire and Emergency Services*, p. 12

2. The star system has been the backbone of the American film industry since the mid 1910s. Stars are the creation of the public, its reigning favorites. Their influence in the fields of fashion, values, and public behavior has been enormous. “The social history of a nation can be written in terms of its film stars,” Raymond Durgnat has observed. Stars confer instant consequence to any film they appear in. Their fees have staggered the public. In the 1920s, Mary Pickford and Charles Chaplin were the two highest paid employees in the world. Contemporary stars such as Julia Roberts and Tom Cruise command salaries of many millions per film, so popular are these box-office giants. Some stars had careers that spanned five decades: Bette Davis and John Wayne, to name just two.

—Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, p. 251

3. For decades, we have looked at our steadily increasing life expectancy rates and proudly proclaimed that Americans’ health has never been better. Recently, however, health organizations and international groups have attempted to quantify the number of years a person lives with a disability or illness, compared with the number of healthy years. The World Health Organization summarizes this concept as **healthy life expectancy**. Simply stated, healthy life expectancy refers to the number of years a newborn can expect to live in full health, based on current rates of illness and mortality and also on the quality of their lives. For example, if we could delay the onset of diabetes so that a person didn’t develop the disease until he or she was 60 years old, rather than developing it at 30, there would be a dramatic increase in this individual’s healthy life expectancy.

—Donatelle, *Health: The Basics*, p. 6

4. Are you “twittered out”? Is all that texting causing your thumbs to seize up in protest? If so, you’re not alone. Like millions of others, you may find that all of the pressure for contact is more than enough stress for you! Known as technostress, the bombardment is defined as stress created by a dependence on technology and the constant state of being plugged in or wirelessly connected, which can include a perceived obligation to respond, chat, or tweet.

—Donatelle, *Health: The Basics*, p.66

5. In the past, exposure to liability made many doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals reluctant to stop and render aid to victims in emergency situations, such as highway accidents. Almost all states have enacted a **Good**



Samaritan law that relieves medical professionals from liability for injury caused by their ordinary negligence in such circumstances. Good Samaritan laws protect medical professionals only from liability for their *ordinary negligence*, not for injuries caused by their gross negligence or reckless or intentional conduct. Most Good Samaritan laws protect licensed doctors and nurses and laypersons who have been certified in CPR. Good Samaritan statutes generally do not protect laypersons who are not trained in CPR—that is, they are liable for injuries caused by their ordinary negligence in rendering aid.

— Goldman and Cheeseman, *Paralegal Professional*, p. 459

## Writing: Developing Effective Topic Sentences

As a writer, it is important to develop clear and concise topic sentences that help your readers understand your ideas and guide them through your paragraphs. A good topic sentence does two things:

- It makes clear what the paragraph is about—the topic.
- It expresses a viewpoint about the topic.

An effective topic sentence always expresses a viewpoint about the topic. A viewpoint is an attitude or focus about a topic. If the topic is wild game hunting, there are several viewpoints that you could express about it:

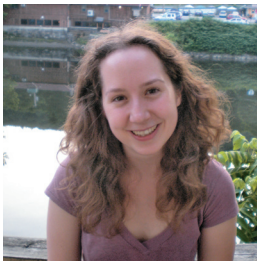
- Wild game hunting helps control overpopulation of wildlife.
- Wild game hunting involves killing animals for pleasure.
- Wild game hunting allows hunters to experience and appreciate nature.

Each of the above examples offers a different attitude toward the topic. In contrast, notice how the following sentences do *not* express a viewpoint.

- There are 2 million wild game hunters in the United States.
- Wild game hunting season often begins in the fall.

If you write a topic sentence without a viewpoint, you will find you have very little to write about in the remainder of the paragraph.

If you look at Kate's essay, you will see that she started each paragraph with a clear topic sentence that indicated her topic and her viewpoint about it. Now complete the following exercise to look more closely at her topic sentences.



### EXERCISE 3-5

## Reading: Identifying Viewpoint

**Directions:** For each of the following topic sentences, underline the viewpoint expressed toward the topic.

1. Russia and the United States share a complex history riddled with conflict and mutual mistrust.
2. The Russian Ministry of Education determines the curriculum and as a result all schools meet certain national standards of education.
3. Unlike Russia, the United States does not have a county-level curriculum.
4. In the classroom, the code of conduct between students and teachers is formal and respectful.

## EXERCISE 3-6

## Writing: Expressing a Viewpoint About a Topic

**Directions:** For each of the following topic sentences, write a topic sentence that expresses a different viewpoint about the topic. *Answers will vary. Possible answers are shown.*

1. It is better to live in a city than in the country because the city offers many more activities and opportunities to its residents.

*It is better to live in the country than in a city because the country offers more fresh air, more open space, and a lower crime rate.*

2. Because tobacco products harm people's health, all tobacco products should be banned.

*Because many products harm people's health, it would not be fair to single out tobacco.*

3. Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace create communities of close-knit friends.

*Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace can be a substitute for real human interaction.*

4. *Dancing with the Stars* entertains us by allowing celebrities to exhibit their unknown dance talents.

*Dancing with the Stars is a rigged contest that exhibits celebrities whose lack of dance talent is covered up by their dance professional partners.*

Now that you know how to develop a manageable topic and determine your point of view, you are ready to put the two together and write topic sentences.

## Writing: Broad Versus Narrow Topic Sentences

A topic sentence should be neither too broad nor too narrow. Either produces an ineffective paragraph.

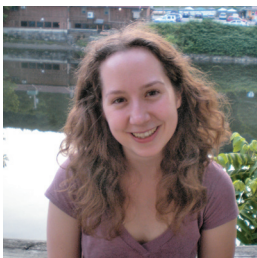
## Topic Sentences That Are Too Narrow

If your topic sentence is too narrow, you will not have enough to write about to complete a paragraph. Topics that are too narrow often lack a viewpoint.

**TOO NARROW:** Almost 90% of Americans own cell phones.

**REVISED:** Americans own and use a wide variety of cell phones, depending on their work and personal needs.

Below is an example of a topic sentence Kate revised after realizing it was too narrow and would be hard to write about or find details to support.



**TOO NARROW:** In Russia, primary and secondary education is compulsory from around age seven to age fifteen.

**REVISED:** In Russia, primary and secondary education is compulsory from around age seven to age fifteen, after which students either go on to vocational school, join the work force, or remain in secondary school for two more years in order to graduate and go on to higher education.

To revise a topic sentence that is too narrow, use the following tips:

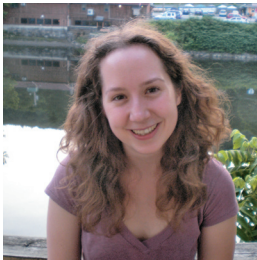
- State a clear viewpoint about your topic.
- Broaden your topic to include a wider group or range of items.
- Expand your topic to include causes and effects or comparisons or contrasts.

### Topic Sentences That Are Too Broad

If your topic sentence is too broad, you will have trouble covering all aspects of it in a single paragraph. Topics that are too broad often lead to rambling or disorganized writing. You will find that you have too many general statements and not enough specifics to support them.

**TOO BROAD:** Internet crime in the world today is increasing dramatically.

**REVISED:** Phishing scams are responsible for increases in identify theft among senior citizens in our town.



In the example below, Kate first wrote a very broad topic sentence that she revised after finding she could only make very general statements to support it. The revised topic sentence indicates she is contrasting the US and Russian systems and allows her to focus on the main differences in curriculum between the two countries.

**TOO BROAD:** There are many types of educational curriculum in the US.

**REVISED:** Unlike Russia, the United States does not have a country-level curriculum.

To revise a topic sentence that is too broad, use the following tips:

- Narrow your topic by subdividing it.
- Rewrite your topic sentence to focus on one aspect or part of the topic.
- Apply the topic sentence to a specific time and place.
- Consider using one of your details as a topic sentence.

As you write your topic sentences, keep the following tips in mind:

### Tips for Writing Effective Topic Sentences

Use the following suggestions to write clear topic sentences:

1. **Your topic sentence should state the main point of your paragraph.** It should identify your topic and express a view toward it.
2. **Be sure to choose a manageable topic**—one that is neither too general nor too specific. Topic sentences that are too general often promise more than they can deliver in a single paragraph. They lead to writing that is vague and rambling. Topic sentences that are too specific produce weak paragraphs because there is not enough to say about them.
3. **Make sure your topic sentence is a complete thought.** Be sure your topic sentence is not a fragment or run-on sentence (see pp. 535 and 540).

*(continued)*

**4. Place your topic sentence first in the paragraph.** Topic sentences often appear in other places in paragraphs, as described earlier, or their controlling idea is implied, not stated. For now, it will be easiest for you to put yours at the beginning. That way, as you write, you can make sure you stick to your point, and your readers will immediately be alerted to that point.

**5. Avoid announcing your topic.** Sentences that sound like announcements are usually unnecessary. Avoid such sentences as “This paragraph will discuss how to change a flat tire,” or “I will explain why I object to legalized abortion.” Instead, directly state your main point: “Changing a flat tire involves many steps,” or “I object to abortion on religious grounds.”

Not all expert or professional writers follow all of these suggestions. Sometimes, a writer may use one-sentence paragraphs or include topic sentences that are fragments to achieve a special effect. You will find these paragraphs in news and magazine articles and other sources. Although professional writers can use these variations effectively, you probably should not experiment with them too early. It is best while you are polishing your skills to use a more standard style of writing, as you can see Kate did in her essay.

### EXERCISE 3-7

## Writing: Evaluating Topic Sentences

**Directions:** Evaluate each of the following topic sentences and mark them as follows:

E = effective

A = announcement

S = too specific

G = too general

N = not complete thought

- A   1. This paper will discuss the life and politics of Simón Bolívar.
- G   2. Japanese culture is fascinating to study because its family traditions are so different from American traditions.
- S   3. The admission test for the police academy includes vocabulary questions.
- E   4. The discovery of penicillin was a great step in the advancement of modern medicine.
- A   5. I will talk about the reasons for the popularity of reality television shows.
- N   6. A habit leading to weight gain.
- S   7. Each year Americans are the victims of more than 1 million auto thefts.
- G   8. The White House has many famous rooms and an exciting history.
- E   9. There are three factors to consider when buying a flat-screen TV.
- G   10. Iraq has a long and interesting history.



## EXERCISE 3-8

## Writing: Revising Topic Sentences

**Directions:** Analyze the following topic sentences. If a sentence is too general or too specific, or if it makes a direct announcement or is not a complete thought, revise it to make it more effective. *Answers will vary.*

1. World hunger is a crime.

REVISED *too general*

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2. E-mail is used by a great many people.

REVISED *too general*

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3. I will point out the many ways energy can be saved in the home.

REVISED *makes an announcement*

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4. Because Congress is very important in the United States.

REVISED *incomplete thought*

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5. In 2010, over 10,000 people died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes.

REVISED *too specific*

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## Think Critically About Topic Sentences

### ■ GOAL 4

Think critically about  
topic sentences

Often, topic sentences are simple statements of fact that cannot be disputed. However, not all topic sentences are completely factual. Sometimes a topic sentence presents an opinion about a topic, and that statement may not offer all sides of the story. (To learn more about distinguishing fact and opinion, refer to Chapter 12.) Look at the following passage:

No doubt about it, lobbying is a growth industry. Every state has hundreds of public relations practitioners whose specialty is representing their clients to legislative bodies and government agencies. In North Dakota, hardly a populous state, more than 300 people are registered as lobbyists in the capital city of Bismarck. The number of registered lobbyists in Washington, D.C., exceeds 10,000 today. In addition, there are an estimated 20,000 other people who have slipped through registration requirements but who nonetheless ply the halls of government to plead their clients' interests.

In one sense, lobbyists are expeditors. They know local traditions and customs, and they know who is in a position to affect policy. Lobbyists advise their clients, which include trade associations, corporations, public interest groups and regulated utilities and industries, on how to achieve their goals by working with legislators and government regulators. Many lobbyists call themselves "government relations specialists."

—Vivian, *The Media of Mass Communication*, pp. 278–279

The topic sentence of the first paragraph is a statement of fact; the author can prove without a doubt that “lobbying is a growth industry.” The topic sentence of the second paragraph is: “Lobbyists are expeditors.” That is, lobbyists help their clients influence the government in their favor. But this topic sentence presents *only* “one sense” of the topic. What is the other sense or view? Lobbying is actually a controversial activity, and many people believe that lobbyists spend large amounts of money influencing government employees in unethical or illegal ways. However, that belief is not reflected in the topic sentence of this passage.

## EXERCISE 3-9

## Reading: Analyzing Topics

**Directions:** For each of the following sets of topic sentences, specify the topic that is being discussed. Note that each topic sentence presents a different facet of (or opinion about) the topic.

1. ■ “The continued flow of immigrants into the United States has created a rich, diverse society that has been beneficial to the country.”  
 ■ “The presence of guest workers from South America in states like Arizona and California has a positive effect on the U.S. economy.”  
 ■ “Because the country is suffering from high unemployment, we must reduce the number of people who come here looking for jobs.”

Topic: immigration

2. ■ “Most scientists agree that temperatures now are warmer than they were 20 years ago.”  
 ■ “It is hard to draw any definite conclusions from the hundreds of studies that have considered whether climate change is occurring or not.”  
 ■ “People who claim that the Earth is now hotter miss the point that the Earth has been getting warmer over the last several thousand years, not just the last 50 years.”

Topic: climate change, or global warming

## READ AND RESPOND: A Student Essay



## The Russian and U.S. School Systems

Kate Atkinson

The questions and activities below refer to Kate’s essay “The Russian and U.S. School Systems” on page 98 that we have used as a model throughout the chapter. Now you are ready to examine her writing and write in response to her essay.

## Examining Writing (See essay on p. 98.)

1. How does Kate indicate to her readers that she will be addressing two topics in her essay?
2. Does each paragraph in Kate's essay address a narrow and specific topic?
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of her topic sentences.
4. In each paragraph, does Kate provide enough details to explain and support the topic sentence?
5. What overall attitude toward education in the two countries does Kate reveal throughout the essay?

## Writing Assignments

1. In her essay Kate compares and contrasts two different but highly successful systems of education. Create a summary of the main points of comparison she addresses in the essay.
2. Write a paragraph about an aspect of American education (or that of another country, if you have experienced it) that you think makes the system valuable and important.

## READ AND RESPOND: A Professional Essay

### Greed, Cancer, and Pink KFC Buckets

John Robbins

You read the professional essay "Greed, Cancer, and Pink KFC Buckets" earlier in the chapter, where it was used to demonstrate reading techniques. Now it is time to examine it more closely by answering the following questions.

## Writing in Response to Reading (See essay on p. 91.)

### Checking Your Comprehension

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Answer each of the following questions using complete sentences.

1. Describe the "Buckets for the Cure" campaign.
2. According to the American Institute for Cancer Research, what percentage of all cancers can be prevented with lifestyle changes?
3. What is the number one dietary recommendation of the American Institute for Cancer Research?

4. What is “pinkwashing” and what does it have to do with the Komen/KFC campaign?
5. Write a brief summary of what PETA investigators found at the KFC “Supplier of the Year” slaughterhouse in West Virginia. How did KFC’s animal-welfare advisory council react?

### Strengthening Your Vocabulary MySkillsLab®

Using the word’s context, word parts, or a dictionary, write a brief definition of each of the following words as it is used in the reading.

1. profound (paragraph 1) deep
2. advocacy (paragraph 1) active support of a cause
3. cynical (paragraph 5) skeptical, pessimistic
4. vanquished (paragraph 5) defeated, eliminated
5. derided (paragraph 7) criticized, condemned
6. atrocious (paragraph 11) terrible
7. jeopardize (paragraph 13) put at risk
8. authenticity (paragraph 13) genuineness, validity

### Examining the Reading: Drawing an Idea Map

Create an idea map of the reading that starts with the title and thesis and then lists the author’s main points. Use the guidelines on page 15.

### Reading and Writing: An Integrated Perspective MySkillsLab®

Get ready to write about the reading by discussing the following:

1. Discuss why Komen chose to partner with KFC. Do you think the “Buckets for the Cure” campaign will be considered successful?
2. Write a journal entry that summarizes the author’s opinion regarding the partnership between Komen and KFC. Do you agree or disagree with his opinion?
3. Evaluate the introduction of the essay. What does it add to the piece of writing? How successful is it in capturing your interest?
4. How does the photo accompanying this essay add to or detract from the material? Do you think a different photo would be more effective? What would it show?



#### THINKING VISUALLY

### Thinking and Writing Critically MySkillsLab®

1. Did the description of animal abuse at KFC’s supplier affect your opinion of fast food in general and KFC in particular? Why or why not?
2. The author included both facts and opinions to support his thesis in this essay. Find examples of both and evaluate their effectiveness.
3. What is the author’s purpose for writing this essay? Who is his intended audience?



## Writing Paragraphs

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1. How would this essay be different if it were written as a strictly factual report? Write a paragraph in which you summarize the facts of the essay in objective language.
2. Write a paragraph explaining whether you agree or disagree that Susan G. Komen for the Cure has “jeopardize[d] public confidence in its authenticity” by partnering with KFC.
3. The author points to the importance of a healthy diet in preventing cancer. Do you think most people (including yourself) make that connection? Write a paragraph explaining your answer.

## Writing Essays

MySkillsLab®

4. Is it appropriate for advocacy organizations such as Komen to promote their causes using commercial means? Write an essay explaining why or why not. Try to think of other advocacy groups that have formed such partnerships, on either a national or a local level.
5. What responsibility do restaurants and other commercial enterprises have toward consumer health? Write an essay exploring this question. In your own experience, what effect does “educational messaging” from advertising campaigns have on your lifestyle choices?
6. Imagine that you are a member of an animal-welfare advisory council for a large company. What guidelines would you promote for the company to follow regarding animal welfare? Write an essay describing your ideas for animal welfare in a commercial setting.

## SELF-TEST SUMMARY

To test yourself, cover the Answer column with a sheet of paper and answer each question in the left column. Evaluate each of your answers as you work by sliding the paper down and comparing your answer with what is printed in the Answer column.

QUESTION	ANSWER
<p>■ <b>GOAL 1 Structure a paragraph</b></p> <p>What is a paragraph and what are its three key elements?</p>	<p>A paragraph is a group of related sentences that develop one thought or idea. The three key elements are the <i>topic</i>, <i>topic sentence</i>, and <i>supporting details</i>.</p>
<p>■ <b>GOAL 2 Identify and select topics</b></p> <p>How do I identify and select the topic of a paragraph?</p>	<p>To locate the topic, look for the one thing the author is discussing throughout the paragraph. To select a topic, use freewriting, brainstorming, branching, and questioning to generate ideas.</p>

(continued)

*(continued)*

QUESTION	ANSWER
<p>■ <b>GOAL 3</b> Read and write topic sentences</p> <p>How can I identify topic sentences and write effective topic sentences?</p>	<p>To locate a topic sentence, choose the most general sentence that includes all the other ideas in the paragraph. To write a topic sentence, identify your topic and express a viewpoint about it. Be sure your topic sentence is neither too broad nor too narrow.</p>
<p>■ <b>GOAL 4</b> Think critically about topic sentences</p> <p>How can I think critically about topic sentences?</p>	<p>Be alert for topic sentences that express opinions. Consider whether there are other views that can be held about the topic.</p>

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Visit **Chapter 3, “Topics, Main Ideas, and Topic Sentences,”** in MySkillsLab to test your understanding of chapter goals.