

**A good topic sentence must have a focus that is neither too vague nor too specific.**

**Too vague:** Athletes eat a healthy diet.

This topic sentence needs a clear controlling idea to give it a more specific focus. We don't get a clear idea of the writer's position on the topic. For example, do they believe this is a positive thing or a negative thing?

**Too specific:** Athletes on average consume 3000 calories per day.

This sentence reads more like a detail that develops a supporting idea and should be in the body of the paragraph.

**Effective:** Athletes have particular dietary requirements that support high performance levels.

This is an effective topic sentence because it indicates what the content of the paragraph is about without giving the actual details.

**A. Read the topic sentences below and indicate whether they are too vague 'V', too specific 'S', or if they are effective 'E'.**

- ..... 1. Leeds is a city in England.
- ..... 2. Melbourne is one of the world's best sporting cities.
- ..... 3. Gutenberg's printing press was invented in the 15th Century.
- ..... 4. The invention of the Internet has had a profound impact on education.
- ..... 5. Malaria is a tropical disease.
- ..... 6. The Mediterranean diet is one of the healthiest in the world.
- ..... 7. The first iPhone was released in June 2007.
- ..... 8. African American culture has made a very significant impact on global culture.

**B. The topic sentences below are either too vague or too specific. Re-write them to make them more effective.**

Example: Rome was an ancient civilization.

..... *Ancient Rome has had a major influence on Western culture.* .....

1. Last year, 89 million people visited France.

.....  
2. The Olympics is a global sporting event.

.....  
3. The unemployment rate was reduced by 1.2% in the last financial year.

.....  
4. Google is a large American technology company.

.....  
5. Harvard University, in most years, tops global university rankings.

**C. The paragraphs below are missing a topic sentence. For each paragraph, write an effective topic sentence.**

1. ....

The first of these animals is the coastal taipan which is, according to a number of sources, the most venomous snake in the world. It is found in forests, coastal heaths and grassy beach dunes across the entire northern part of Australia. Another deadly creature, which is found in the same areas that coastal taipans inhabit, is the saltwater crocodile. This is the largest known species of crocodile and each year kills about two people. Another fatal species found in the northern regions is the box jelly fish. Their venom is regarded as among the most powerful in the world, containing toxins that assault the heart, nervous system, and skin cells. Human victims often drown or die of heart failure even before reaching shore, such is the level of pain inflicted. The final and perhaps most feared animal found in Australia is the great white shark. This shark species is found in all coastal waters across Southern Australia. In 2020, Australia experienced seven fatal great white shark attacks.

2. ....

The first argument against capital punishment is that it kills innocent people. For instance, in the United States alone, one in twenty-five people sentenced to death have later been exonerated. Many also cite moral reasons for banning the death penalty. Abolitionists assert that capital punishment violates the idea that life is sacred and is basically inhuman and undignified. Finally, there is strong evidence to suggest that capital punishment has no positive impact in reducing violent crime. For example, states that impose the death penalty often have higher rates of homicide than states that do not.

3. ....

The first similarity between surfing and snowboarding is that they both require the rider to stand on a board with either the left or right foot forward. These boards are both encased in a layer of fiberglass and are shaped for specific conditions. Apart from them both using boards, these sports are both usually best pursued in remote natural places. The best snowboarding takes place in remoter mountain regions, and the best surfing conditions are often found in hard to reach offshore reefs. Finally, both sports can be very dangerous. For example, snowboarders can easily injure themselves on steeper slopes, and in some cases, are at risk from avalanches. Likewise, surfers can be smashed onto reefs when wiping out and are also vulnerable to shark attacks.

4. ....

The first is that cars are not environmentally friendly. It is well known that cars with internal combustion engines are one of the main contributors to global carbon emissions, but electric vehicles are also problematic given the fact that, in many cases, the original source of their power is a coal fired power station. Another drawback of being a car owner is the amount of inconvenience they bring to one's life. People who do not own a car do not have to worry about finding scarce and expensive parking spaces, they do not have to worry about taking their car to a workshop for regular maintenance, and if they are caught in a traffic jam while using a bus or a taxi, they can simply get out and walk. Finally, having a car is just a poor financial decision. This is because energy costs are ever increasing, the cost of parts and labour for repairs and maintenance are generally always expensive, but mostly because the value of a car diminishes significantly the moment it is driven out of the dealership.