

arguments, and to convey meaning through well-constructed text. In its most advanced form, written expression can be as vivid as a work of art. As children learn the steps of writing, and as they build new skills upon old, writing evolves from the first simple sentences to elaborate stories and essays. Spelling, vocabulary, grammar,

## English Writing Skills

## Lesson 3

### Topic Sentences and Supporting Sentences

Topic sentence has two components: 1) topic 2) controlling idea

What is the difference?

Topic – general

Controlling idea – specific aspect of topic

What is the topic and controlling idea in each of the following sentences?

- Afghan weddings are expensive, especially for the groom.
- If you want to learn a language, immersion is the best way to do it.
- Although biking on campus is necessary, we should implement some rules to make it safe for everyone.
- Solving the problem of gun violence in America is not complicated; it is simple.
- Spanking children isn't child abuse, but it's not an effective way to teach a lesson.

In each of these examples, what kind of information would you expect to follow? In other words, what will the supporting sentences tell you?

**Supporting sentences** develop the idea expressed in the topic sentence by providing details in the form of

- Examples
- Anecdotes
- Statistics
- Quotations

(Elicit an example of each kind of support using the Afghan weddings example.)

### Practice Exercise 1

*In the last class, we wrote topic sentences for the following topics. Choose one of the topic sentences you wrote and develop a paragraph. Each person should write a paragraph.*

Traveling in Afghanistan  
Sports  
Teaching

Learning English  
Being a journalist  
Flowers

### Peer Editing

When you are finished, exchange paragraphs with someone else who has finished. Read each other's paragraph. Do all sentences in the paragraph support the topic sentence? Submit your paragraph to me after one of your colleagues has read it.

**In Real World Writing, there are fundamentally six purposes for writing:**

- Express and Reflect. ... ..
- Inform and Explain. ... ..
- Evaluate and Judge. ... ..
- Inquire and Explore. ...wrestles with a question or problem. ...
- Analyze and Interpret. ...
- Take a Stand and Propose a Solution.

## Commas

Commas can be frustrating for English learners because the rules seem to change a lot. And in fact this is true; they do change a lot. The thing to remember about commas is that there are a few basic rules that most people follow and then there are variations and other rules that people use more subjectively.

Keep in mind that you will always find exceptions to the rules, and different publications will have slight differences in how they apply rules. My advice is to learn some basic punctuation rules, and if you are writing for a publication, consult their style guide. It may make you feel good to know that because there are so many variations in English punctuation, even native English speakers use style guides. As always, your goal should be to make your writing clear for the reader.

Below are three common rules for comma usage in English. The first two are relatively simple. We will go over these very briefly. The third rule sometimes causes difficulties for learners of English, so we will spend most of our efforts there.

### 1. Words or phrases in a series of 3 or more.

- e.g. The stripes on the Afghan flag are black, red and green.  
The three most populous cities in the US are New York, Los Angeles and Chicago.  
If you want to be healthy, you should eat a good diet, exercise regularly, and enjoy time with your friends and family.

Is it necessary to use a comma before "and" in a list? It depends. If the items in the list are short, as in the examples about the Afghan flag and the cities in the US, a comma is not required. When the items in a list are longer, you should include a comma before "and."

### 2. After most transition words at the beginning of sentences. (You can find in-depth explanation of this in most good grammar books.)

- e.g. first, next, finally  
also, furthermore, in addition  
however, on the other hand  
for example,  
therefore,

### Examples

We decided to have a picnic tomorrow.

First, we need to get some food.

Next, we need to find a good place to have the picnic.

Also, we should check the weather forecast.

Unfortunately, Faisal can't go to the picnic because he has a lot of work to do.

Therefore, we will bring him back some food from the picnic.