

Lesson Skill: Writing a topic sentence

Strand Writing, Reading — Nonfiction

SOL 3.6, 3.9

4.7, 4.7

5.6, 5.7

Materials

- Copies of the Main Idea Group Activity (attached), cut apart, and placed into envelopes
- Copies of an interesting recent informational article
- Copies of the Topic Sentence Writing Game (attached) and envelopes
- Sheets of paper or large sticky notes

Lesson

1. Review the concept of main idea using the Main Idea Group Activity, and discuss it as a class. Ask students to share how they were able to ascertain which sentence card had the main idea. Responses should include that the main idea was the statement for which all other statements related. Explain that this sentence is called the *topic sentence* of the paragraph.
2. Distribute a recent informational article to each student, and have students underline or highlight the main idea of a particular paragraph. Have students share their individual findings with a partner and come to a consensus on the topic sentence. As a class, share responses, and come to a class consensus on the main idea.
3. Distribute copies of the Topic Sentence Writing Game. Have students write main ideas based on the directions for the game. (An activity extension idea would be to then write the entire paragraph—the newly constructed main idea sentence and several facts to support it—on chart paper with the main idea labeled, for display.)
4. Have students write on a subject of their choice, making sure to include a topic sentence. Or have students choose a piece of their own previously written material and either locate the topic sentence or revise the piece to have a topic sentence.

Strategies for Differentiation

- Display the chosen informational article using available technology; allow students to identify and underline the main idea of each paragraph.
- Use digital text; use the Highlighter tool in a word processing program.
- Provide students with the topic sentences, and have them write three supporting details for each one.
- Have students reread a previously written essay. Have them use one color to identify the main idea or topic sentence of the introductory paragraph, the body paragraphs, and the conclusion. Have them also underline the supporting sentences for each paragraph with another color.

- To provide additional support, provide one paragraph initially, and students can underline the main idea with a colored pencil and the supporting details with an alternate color.

Main Idea Group Activity

Each rectangle has four sentences, one of which is the topic sentence. Cut apart the four strips in each rectangle, and place them in an envelope. (There are enough to have five envelopes.)

Place students into groups. Each group will receive one envelope. Allow each group to determine which sentence is the topic sentence. Have each group discuss (and/or write) how they know that the chosen sentence is the topic sentence. If time permits, rotate the groups through each of the envelopes. Also, some groups might need more practice than others, so this would be helpful.

My favorite ice cream to get in the summer is mint chocolate chip.

Ice cream is my favorite treat on a hot summer day.

Sometimes the ice cream man comes by my house in his truck, and I run out to get some!

The sun beats down on the ice cream and makes it melt all over my hand, but I don't mind.

(Answer: Ice cream is my favorite treat on a hot summer day.)

I know that I have to flatten the gum on the top of my mouth, but I can't always get it flat.

When I try to blow the gum out into a bubble, it just sits there on my tongue.

It is difficult to blow bubbles with gum.

Sticking my tongue through the gum never works for me.

(Answer: It is difficult to blow bubbles with gum.)

Once you have a glass of milk, squirt some chocolate sauce (or spoon in the powder) into the glass.

Chocolate milk is made in three easy steps.

With a spoon, stir the mixture until it is all combined, and your white milk has turned chocolatey!

First, you have to pour regular milk into a glass.

(Answer: Chocolate milk is made in three easy steps.)

Yesterday, my dog dragged the toilet paper from the roll in the bathroom all over the house!

I have to be very careful about my homework, or I really will be able to say, "The dog ate it."

My dog is really naughty.

My dog has been known to get into things that he shouldn't—like the trash can.

(Answer: My dog is really naughty.)

Without my mom telling me, I go up to bed a few minutes early so that I can read my favorite book.

I put on my pajamas, making sure to pick the most comfortable ones!

Every night I do the same things before bed.

At the end of the evening, I brush my teeth.

(Answer: Every night I do the same things before bed.)

Topic Sentence Writing Game

Objective

To see whether students can match his/her topic sentence to the hidden topic sentence card.

Preparation

On the outside of a mailing or manila envelope, glue the detail sentences card. Place the topic sentence card from the same kit inside the envelope away from view. (More than one group can use the same kit—just make copies, and place the groups far enough away from each other so that they cannot hear the other group.) Note: The topics in this game are related to specific science SOL, and those standards have been documented for your own information. However, a student in any 3–5 grade may use the cards, as the information is generalized for this purpose.

Directions

Partner students, and have them read the detail sentences on the card. Without looking at the topic sentence card, have the partners construct a topic sentence for the three detail sentences. Once the partners finish, remove the topic sentence card from its envelope to see how close they have come. (Game Extension: Explain how you arrived at your topic sentence by citing the related detail sentences.)

Group Materials Kit 1

When water on the earth is warmed by the sun, it evaporates into the air. We call this evaporation.

Once water has evaporated, it condenses in the form of clouds. This is called condensation.

When the air becomes saturated with water, precipitation will occur.

Place this card inside the envelope:

There are three parts to the water cycle.

Group Materials Kit 2

One way to conserve water is to turn off the water when you brush your teeth.

Another way to use less water is to place a bucket in the shower when you bathe and use that water to water your plants (Make sure there is no soap or shampoo in the water.)

Finally, turn off the water when you aren't using it.

Place this card inside the envelope:

There are many ways to conserve water.

Group Materials Kit 3

The crust is the outer layer of the Earth.

Just under the Earth's crust, you will find the upper and lower mantle.

In the Earth's center is the core.

Place this card inside the envelope:

The Earth is made up of layers.