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Lesson One

Paragraphs

A paragraph is a *group of sentences*, all of which tell about the same *topic*. Every paragraph has one basic sentence called the *topic sentence*, which has two principal parts: the *topic* and the *clew*. The *topic* is definite and specific; whereas, the *clew* is general enough to give the writer room for explanations and information developing the topic.

EXAMPLE:

Religion is a necessary, an indispensable element in any great human character. There is no living without it. Religion is the tie that connects man to his Creator, and holds him to his throne.
(Daniel Webster, 1782-1852)

In the paragraph above, the first sentence (italicized) is the topic sentence, stating the main theme or idea of the paragraph. Within the topic sentence *religion* is the specific or definite topic, and the rest of the sentence contains the general clew. This topic sentence tells us that all of the remaining sentences in the paragraph should deal with the subject of religion and should tell us how religion is a necessary part of human greatness. When we examine the other two sentences in this paragraph, we see that both of them indeed deal with religion and give us additional information on how religion is indispensable.

The topic sentence is a guide to both the writer and the reader. It helps the writer remained focused on his subject and avoid introducing irrelevant material that may confuse the reader or distract from the writer's point. A good topic sentence helps the reader follow the logical progression of the writer's thoughts.

Although simple sentences are perhaps the clearest and most effective types of topic sentences, a good writer will use a variety of topic sentences if his work extends for several paragraphs. Topics may be stated in phrases or in clauses of compound, complex, or compound-complex sentences. Topic sentences may be declarative, interrogatory, exclamatory, or imperative. (*See Glossary for definitions of these terms.*)

Paragraphs can generally be classified in one of four categories:

1. *Expository* paragraphs *explain* a topic.
2. *Narrative* paragraphs *tell a story*.
3. *Descriptive* paragraphs *describe* a topic.
4. *Argumentative* paragraphs make a statement and try to prove it to be true.

