

Writing Effective Topic Sentences

Just as sentences in the paragraph relate to the topic sentence, the topic sentence should relate back to a key point in the thesis. This makes your essay have an overall connectedness, which is exactly what a reader wants to see.

Consider the following sample “model” essay written by an actual student who took a TOEFL iBT practice test :

Many students have to live with roommates while going to school or university. What are some of the important qualities of a good roommate? Use specific reasons and examples to explain why these qualities are important.

Choosing a roommate to live with is a much more important decision than most students think it is. To me, it is like giving your house key to someone you may not know too well. I need to be able to trust this person fully without a doubt in my mind that they will respect my privacy and personal belongings. Hanging out with someone and living with somebody are two very different activities. In order for me to choose a person worthy enough to be my roommate, that person must have specific qualities I am looking for. The most important characteristic should be honesty. Other traits I would look for is cleanliness and a clean slate.

If I am going to live with someone, it is imperative that they understand and practice honesty. My possessions are of high value to me and I want to be able to leave the room worry free; that is, even my smallest insignificant piece of property goes untouched unless permission is granted. I would treat the other person’s property in the same fashion, so I expect it in return.

I cannot stand to live in a disorganized place where everything is cluttered around. I am a neat person and to me, everything has its own place. I like things to be organized so I know exactly where it is when I need it. I found that I do not get along well with messy people. This is not to say that I don’t have messy friends, but living with messy people is a different ball game.

Having a clean slate is an important characteristic to me because I don’t want to get caught up in problems resulting from the illegal activities of someone else. Even though I may not have committed any crimes, I could still be involved because I live with that person. Those are extra problems I could do without. Some of those activities can also be contagious, where I might start participating in it merely because I am around it. Living with the person forces me to be around it, whereas if I was just hanging around, I can just leave and go elsewhere.

There are many people I hang out with but I would not choose to live with them. In order for me to even consider living with them, they would have to be honest, tidy, and clean, at the very least.

Now read the essay after everything has been removed except for the thesis and the topic sentences:

*The most important characteristic should be **honesty**. Other traits I would look for is **cleanliness** and a **clean slate**.*

*If I am going to live with someone, it is imperative that they understand and practice **honesty**.*

*I cannot stand to live in a **disorganized** place where everything is **cluttered** around.*

*Having a **clean slate** is an important characteristic to me because I don't want to get caught up in problems resulting from the illegal activities of someone else.*

*There are many people I hang out with but I would not choose to live with them. In order for me to even consider living with them, they would have to be **honest, tidy, and clean**, at the very least.*

This essay is effective because

- ↪ By introducing the qualities of honesty, cleanliness and a clean slate and by developing them in subsequent paragraphs with specific reasons and examples, the essay has effectively addressed the writing task.
- ↪ The essay has a strong thesis statement in the first paragraph, and the essay restates those key points as topic sentences in the remaining paragraphs to give the essay a tight organization.
- ↪ Though the conclusion is short, the writer brings the main points of the essay to a closure by saying that a person has to be honest, tidy, and clean, at the very least.

Consider the following sample “unmodel” essay written by an actual student who took a practice TOEFL iBT practice test:

Writing Prompt

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? People should be polite, no matter what the situation. Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.

There are many reasons why people should always be polite. First, people always learn polite in the school. Teachers always teach about politeness. So people believe to need to be polite whatever the situation. The adults also usually teach politeness to their children. In the society, it requires politeness too because the society consists of many people; they don't want to hurt each other.

On the other hand, some people disagree about “people should always be polite, no matter what the situation” because it seems like it is their fault. People have many emotions: happy, sad, angry, satisfy, upset, shy, etc. So, always politeness is hard for all people.

Although politeness is hard for people, it is always needed for people because people are society animals. Society also has been rule for long time. So people have to keep rule. If they break the rule themselves, They aren't people anymore. Furthermore, they need politeness for protecting themselves. So I believe, politeness is always needed by us. As result, we can live more friendly each other.

Now read the essay after I have removed everything but the thesis and the topic sentences:

*First, people always learn polite in the **school**. So people believe to need to be polite whatever the situation. The **adults** also usually **teach politeness** to their **children**. In the **society**, it requires politeness too because the society consists of many people; they don't want to hurt each other.*

On the other hand, some people disagree about “people should always be polite, no matter what the situation” because it seems like it is their fault.

Although politeness is hard for people, it is always needed for people because people are society animals.

This essay is not effective because

- ↪ Although the essay makes a statement about the question by including the key points that politeness exists in school, family, and society, it does not further develop those ideas in the remaining paragraphs.
- ↪ Topic sentences in paragraphs two and three do not connect back to the thesis.
- ↪ Ideas in essay are not adequately developed.