



# **The Way to Effective Writing**

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# Introduction

*The Way to Effective Writing* is based on the notion that part of learning to write involves noticing how various elements in a piece of writing function together. Each unit of this text introduces one building block of effective writing. The emphasis is not only on how the block is formed, but also on how the block functions in an article or essay.

Building is a good metaphor for the writing process. Often, writing instruction pays attention to discrete aspects of writing with insufficient consideration of how everything fits together. However, a house is more than a collection of walls, floors, ceilings, doors, and windows. It is a whole of which these are the various parts. Similarly, writing requires an overall vision of what is being constructed through the writing and how the various parts fit together.

To continue the metaphor, a writer needs to be aware both of the requirements and interests of the house occupants as well as any constraints there may be in terms of size or construction time. Will it be a cottage or a mansion? Perhaps it is not a house at all, but rather an office building, a restaurant, or a school. Answers to these questions will in turn affect what components are used and how they fit together. Readers who begin reading something they thought was a “hotel” only to realize they’re in the middle of a “hospital” can get confused and irritated. Or, if there is no door they may never get inside the piece of writing at all. *The Way to Effective Writing* strives to guide and support the creation of sturdy, appropriate, and aesthetically appealing “structures” of writing.

Units 1-19 begin with a short explanation of the writing point to be covered in the unit. This is followed by four activities that are progressively more challenging. The units end with a concluding remark and an optional homework assignment. The textbook includes a wide range of topics, including technology, fashion, movies, food, music, social commentary, and business. Subsequent units build on prior units, making use of previously introduced building blocks as well as “recycling” material for new purposes. Unit 20 is a comprehensive review of Units 1-19.

Writing is a challenging and complicated endeavor — even in a speaker’s native language. When writing in a foreign or second language it is all the more important that the writer is conscious of what a well-constructed piece of writing in the target language looks like and how it hangs together. Then, armed with these communicative tools, the writer can begin “construction”. *The Way to Effective Writing* is your builder’s manual.



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# ***The Way to Effective Writing***



Unit 

## TOPIC SENTENCES



A paragraph is a piece of writing in which all the sentences are related to one idea or topic. When someone begins to read a paragraph, they need a means by which to process the information they receive, that is, something that will serve as a general overview. This is called the topic sentence because it lets the reader know what the rest of the paragraph is going to be about.



**Read the following paragraph:**

A new robot has narrowed the gap between science fiction and reality. Most people have thrilling images of robots that derive from movies and TV. In reality most robots are uninteresting factory workers. However, Sally, a new housecleaning robot created by a company called House-bots, is completely different. Basically, Sally vacuums. This may not sound very exciting, but she's the first robot made to perform a practical function in your home that is available for a reasonable price. At \$180, she costs about the same as a normal vacuum cleaner. Sally may not be ready to have the leading role in *Star Wars*, but she would not be out of place on Darth Vader's cleaning staff.

In this paragraph, the topic sentence is the first sentence. From this topic sentence we understand that the rest of the paragraph will be about a new robot and how it has changed people's images of robots. All of the subsequent sentences relate to this topic.

**Activity 1:**

Find the topic sentence in the following paragraph and underline it. Does every sentence that comes after it relate to it in some way?



Sylvia Stone, Chris Mather, and Harry Goodman founded House-bots in 1995 with a dream of taking robots out of the realm of science fiction and into people's living rooms. However, first they had to learn some tough lessons about reality. A robot is in essence a computer, but House-bots wanted customers to buy Sally as a household appliance. The problem is that people expect more from appliances than from computers. Appliances have to be low in cost and easy to use. A \$3,000 vacuum cleaner with a 50-page user's manual is just not going to sell.

This time the topic sentence is the second sentence. The first sentence gives a little preparatory information but does not introduce the whole idea of the paragraph. On the other hand, sentence 2, the topic sentence, lets the reader know that the topic will be about the difficulties encountered in getting a robot ready for ordinary people. Again, all of the subsequent sentences relate to this idea.

### ■ Activity 2:

Read the following paragraph, which does not have a topic sentence, and choose the best topic sentence from the choices below. Remember that the topic sentence should encompass the general idea of all of the rest of the paragraph.

The House-bots team had to learn about materials, manufacturing, and the art of business negotiation. They also had to learn the nitty-gritty of housework. They learned the details of cat hairs, lint, and soot. They ran the robot over hard-to-reach areas. Professional cleaners were their most vital guides.

- a) The House-bots team had to learn a lot about cleaning floors.
- b) Getting the robot ready for household markets required a lot of additional work.
- c) Creating the robot took a lot of work.
- d) The scientists had to become businesspeople.



■ **Activity 3:**

The topic sentence of this paragraph is too specific. Rewrite it so that it covers all the points in the paragraph.

Sally works according to a set of simple rules. Turn her on, and away she goes. She can't see more than about six inches at a time, so she just goes back and forth around the room, registering the presence of walls, furniture and other things she bumps into. She navigates according to an advanced computer system. When Sally concludes that her mission is accomplished, she turns herself off.

*Revised topic sentence:* \_\_\_\_\_

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■ **Activity 4:**

Add an appropriate topic sentence to the beginning of this paragraph.

Sally can't reach deep into corners, and she sometimes gets stuck behind furniture. Owners of houses with large, open rooms are Sally's ideal consumers. But even cramped apartments can get more or less clean, and Sally is sure to bring more dedication, endurance, and downright enthusiasm to the job than most of us can summon.

*Topic sentence:* \_\_\_\_\_

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To write a good topic sentence you have to know precisely what you plan to say in your paragraph and be able to say it simply and clearly. It is not always easy to do this when you first set out writing your paragraph. Many writers revise their topic sentence after they finish their paragraph. Checking what you've actually written throughout the rest of your paragraph will enable you to make sure that your topic sentence is appropriate and helpful to your reader.





**Optional homework:**

From the newspaper, Internet or a sales pamphlet, find information about a new gadget or appliance. Imagine how you would explain or introduce the innovation to a reader. Outline your approach below. Then write your topic sentence, being careful that your sentence includes all the key points of your approach.

