



**IELTS™ = 9**

## **For Writing Task 2**

### **Module 2: Essay Topic Sentence**

#### **Task Achievement / Coherence and Cohesion**

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## Introduction:

In this section we look at the main body paragraph's most important point, the topic sentence, and how it helps with your IELTS mark.

### What is a topic sentence?

A topic sentence (TS) is the first sentence (*or half of a sentence of possibly two sentences*) in a main body paragraph that **signals** to the reader / examiner **the central topic of a paragraph**.

### How can topic sentences help maximise my Cohesion and Coherence mark? (*CC = organisation*)

Here is what the IELTS criteria says about paragraphs in the cohesion and coherence (CC) criteria:

7 (8/9) = presents a **clear central topic** within each paragraph

6 = uses paragraphing, but not always logically

5 = paragraphing may be inadequate (not enough)

**Many candidates who should get a 7/8/9 for CC get a 6 or even a 5 because their paragraphs do not have a clear, central topic.**

**A topic sentence will help you, the writer, and the reader, the examiner, focus on a clear, central topic.**

So we have a guideline for topic sentences (TS)

- ◆ Your topic sentence should clearly signal the central topic of the paragraph

## Example Task 1: Advantages and Disadvantages

a) Read the exam task, think of **your** ideas, and answer the following question:

What are “all” the “parts/ aspects” of the task (*as opposed to the general topic*)?

More and more people are going overseas for their holidays. Do the advantages of going overseas for a holiday outweigh the disadvantages?

**Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own experience or knowledge.**

b) Use this TS checklist question to check the two paragraphs below:

Does the topic sentence

- ◆ clearly signal the central topic of the paragraph?

1. **Regarding the advantages, there are two main ones.** *The first is that when you visit another country, you discover more about another culture. You can come across different cultural dress and try different national cuisine. Such experience often helps broaden people's horizons and appreciate life more. The second plus is that the holiday feels like a greater break. Most people would agree that, as you have experienced such new things, you are more likely to return with more fully recharged batteries than if you had holidayed within your country.*
2. **Regarding the advantages, there are two main ones.** *The first is that when you visit another country, you discover more about another culture. You can come across different cultural dress and try different national cuisine. The second is that the holiday feels like a greater break. There is, however, one great disadvantage. When you go on a holiday overseas, you will probably spend far more money than if you go on a holiday in your country. This means it might be difficult save more money or buy other things.*

### Answer:

The TS in first paragraph clearly signals the **actual** central topic of the paragraph: the advantages. In the second paragraph, however, a **significant** part is about the disadvantages. A better signal for saying “hey, reader, this is the central topic of this paragraph” would be

**There is both a positive and negative side to this idea.** Regarding the advantages, the first is that when you visit another country, you discover more about another culture. You can come across different cultural dress and try different national cuisine. The second is that the holiday feels like a greater break. However, there is one great disadvantage. When you go on a holiday overseas, you will probably spend far more money than if you go on a holiday at home. This means you will not be able to buy more things or save more money.

## Example Task 2: Two Questions Essay (problems and consequences)

a) Read the exam task, think of **your** ideas, and answer the following question:

What are “all” the “parts/ aspects” of the task (*as opposed to the general topic*)?

Air pollution is a serious problem in many cities around the world. What are the main causes of air pollution in cities, and what are the consequences to people in the cities?

**Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own experience or knowledge.**

### Answers:

1. The general “part” of the task is about pollution, more specifically air pollution, more specifically air pollution in cities.

Your essay should answer two questions, what the causes, more specifically the main causes, are, and what the consequences, more specifically, the consequences to people, even more specifically, the consequences to people in the cities are.

b) The two paragraphs below have more or less the same body, but a different topic sentence. Use this TC checklist question to check the three topic sentences below:

Does the topic sentence

- ◆ clearly signal the central topic of the paragraph?

**There is no doubt that air pollution is a major problem in cities nowadays, with people unable to see, or even breath.** One source of such pollution is private vehicles, which are a chief contributor in any city where the streets are clogged with cars. Although previously this source was limited to cities in developed countries, such as Paris or New York, now it is a major contributor in cities around the world. The second source, factories near or in the cities, can produce incredibly large amounts of smog, which can in some cases even cover the sky. In cities in large-scale manufacturing countries this is a particularly large source.

**It could be said that the two primary sources of air pollution are private vehicles and manufacturing plants.** Concerning the former, private vehicles are a chief contributor in any city where the streets are clogged with cars. Although previously this source was limited to cities in developed countries, such as Paris or New York, now it is a major contributor in cities around the world. The second source, factories near or in the cities, can produce incredibly large amounts of smog, which can in some cases even cover the sky. In cities in large-scale manufacturing countries this is a particularly large source.

**Answer:**

The topic sentence in paragraph 1 does not signal the central topic. The sentence is about a statement that the pollution is bad, but the paragraph is about reasons. Note, it is not bad, as it creates the idea of negativity before talking about the sources of negativity. This is logical. However, the examiner may believe that “people unable to see, or even breathe” is a consequence, so should logically be in the next paragraph. i.e. it is “risky”. The TS in paragraph 2 clearly signals the central topic.

A topic sentence is not compulsory, the IELTS criteria does not talk about topic sentences.

As mentioned it is “safer” as

**A topic sentence will help you, the writer, and the reader, the examiner, focus on a clear, central topic.**

How can topic sentences help maximise my **T**ask **A**chievement mark?  
(TA = how you answer the question)

As mentioned in the section for introductions, to maximize your mark for TA, your essay (and introduction) should

1. address **all** parts of the specific exam task
2. either not introduce ideas that are not in the specific exam task or limit them
3. avoid over-generalizing
4. show a clear position *in answer to* the specific exam task

**MANY candidates who should get an 8/9 for TA get a 6 because they START well but LATER lose focus and over-generalize the task**

Topic Sentences (TS) can help you to continue to focus on the task and the different specific parts of the task. This gives us a second TS guideline. Your topic sentence should:

- ◆ clearly signal the central topic of the paragraph
- ◆ be connected as clearly as possible / reasonable with a specific part of the task

## Example Task 3: Advantages and Disadvantages (“outweigh”)

a) Read the exam task, think of **your** ideas, and answer the following question:

What are “all” the “parts/ aspects” of the task (*as opposed to the general topic*)?

More and more people are going overseas for their holidays. Do the advantages of going overseas for a holiday outweigh the disadvantages?

**Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own experience or knowledge.**

b) Let's say that you think the negatives are more. Use the checklist question to choose the best TS:

- ◆ Is the topic sentence connected as clearly as possible / reasonable with a specific part of the task?
  1. There are, however, negative points as well.
  2. Such advantages are, however, outweighed by the negative points.

### Answer:

The second topic sentence is more clearly connected with the specific exam task, which asks “Do the advantages of going overseas for a holiday **outweigh** the disadvantages?”. Note, the first topic sentence is possible **if** the body of the paragraph is clearly connected with the specific exam part / task.

c) Assuming the writer believes the negatives outweigh the positives, which of the two paragraphs below is better for TA?

**There are, however, negative points as well.** The first one is that popular tourist destinations, such as Venice, are now so overloaded with tourists that they are losing their identity. Not only does this clearly nullify the previously mentioned positive of coming into contact with other cultures, it destroys the lives of the locals. The other downside is tourist-related plane travel's contribution to serious pollution and associated climate problems. The negativity of such acute issues far outweighs the aforementioned positive of people taking a break from their own country.

**There are, however, negative points as well.** The first one is that some popular tourist destinations have quite a few tourists. Although many benefit economically, some of the locals people do not like it, and for some tourists as well it may be disappointing. The other downside is that there is some extra pollution from tourist-related plane travel. Some people believe we are

having environmental problems, if this is true, then such plane travel does not help.

**Answer:** The first one. Although the writer does not directly state in the topic sentence, or even in the body, that the negatives outweigh the positives, it is perfectly clear to the examiner that this is what the writer believes.

Once more, the IELTS criteria does not require a topic sentence. Once more, however....

**MANY candidates who should get an 8/9 for TA get a 6 because they START well but LATER lose focus and over-generalize the task**

**A focused topic sentence will help you keep focused on the specific exam task.**

For example in this task

More and more people are going overseas for their holidays. What are the advantages and disadvantages?

**Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own experience or knowledge.**

A topic sentence like

*“Such advantages are, however, outweighed by the negative points. ....”*

is **very “dangerous”**, as it does not match the specific exam task, and even if the writer simply discusses the negatives rather than showing how the negatives are more, then the topic sentence is quite different from the central topic of the paragraph.

## Example Task 4: Discuss Both Sides

a) Read the exam task, think of **your** ideas, and answer the following question:

What are “all” the “parts/ aspects” of the task (*as opposed to the general topic*)?

Some people say that violence shown in movies and on the news should be restricted since it can increase crime rates, whereas others believe that this is not the case, and such restrictions are not necessary to reduce crime.

Discuss both sides and give your opinion.

b) We will look at topic sentences that begin the paragraph presenting reasons why people believe in restricting. Use the checklist question to choose the most suitable topic sentence for TA:

- ◆ Is the topic sentence connected as clearly as possible / reasonable with a specific part of the task?
- 1. Those who support limiting people’s access to things such as fights or murder in the news in order to help with crime rates usually do so for two main reasons.
- 2. Those who support limiting people’s access to things such as fights or murder in the news and in movies usually do so for two main reasons.
- 3. Those who support limiting people’s access to things such as fights or murder in the news and in movies in order to help with crime rates usually do so for two main reasons.
- 4. I fully believe that violence

**Answer:** All are OK. With number one, the candidate did not mention “movies”. If the candidate talks about this later in the paragraph it is ok, if not, then the TA mark will be less. Number two does not mention the reason for limiting, again if the candidate talks about it later, that is ok. **The third one is the most focused on all parts of the exam. Therefore it is the “safest”.**



## Example Task 5: Two Questions (Causes and Evaluation)

a) Read the exam task, think of **your** ideas, and answer the following question:

What are “all” the “parts/ aspects” of the task (*as opposed to the general topic*)?

Teenagers nowadays are more concerned about their appearance than before. What are the causes of this? Is it a good trend?

**Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own experience or knowledge.**

**Answer:** The general aspect of the task is about appearance, more specifically the fact that **teenagers** are concerned about their appearance, even more specifically that **teenagers nowadays** are more **concerned** about their appearance. i.e. it asks for some comparisons. The position it is asking is to discuss the causes, and give an opinion good / bad.

b) We will look at topic sentences that begin the paragraph presenting causes. Use the checklist question to choose the most suitable topic sentence for TA:

- ◆ Is the topic sentence connected as clearly as possible / reasonable with a specific part of the task?

  1. One of the reasons teenagers used to worry about their appearance is advertising.
  2. Regarding the sources of the trend, it can be argued that there are two main ones.
  3. Regarding why children have greater concern about how they look than before, it can be argued there are two main reasons.
  4. Regarding why teenagers have greater concern about how they look than before, it can be argued there are two main reasons.
  5. It is clear that teens have greater concern about how they look than they used to.

**Answer:**

The first one is not suitable for TA as it talks about the past and not now. The second one is fine. The third one is not good. It paraphrases “teenagers” as “children”. There is a “dangerous” chance the examiner will believe that they are not that similar, so the TA will go down. The fourth one is fine. The fifth one misses part of the task that asks for reasons, instead it over-generalizes and presents a position to a different question “Are teenagers more concerned about their appearance than they used to be.” Note, this is not too bad if in the body the writer does give a position on the reasons, but it is “safer” to do what the task asks.

## Example Task 6: Two Questions (Causes and Evaluation II)

a) Read the exam task, think of **your** ideas, and answer the following question:

What are “all” the “parts/ aspects” of the task (*as opposed to the general topic*)?

For some people, how they look is very important and they can even be concerned about this. Why are they concerned about how they look and do they spend too much money on their appearance?

**Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own experience or knowledge.**

b) Which of the two topic sentences matches the **specific** exam task?

1. There are two main reasons why people are spending more money than they should on how they look.
2. There are two main reasons why teenagers are spending more money than they should on how they look.

b) For the same task, write a topic sentence that directly addresses the “second” question:

## Example Task 7: Two Questions (Causes and Solution)

a) Read the exam task, think of **your** ideas, and answer the following question:

What are “all” the “parts/ aspects” of the task (*as opposed to the general topic*)?

Air pollution is a growing problem in many cities. What are the causes of this and what can the government do about it?

**Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own experience or knowledge.**

b) How good are these topic sentences?

1. In many countries the rise in air pollution levels has occurred due to two main reasons.
2. The rise in air pollution levels has occurred due to two main reasons.

**Answer:**

The first one is not bad, as it addresses the reasons, and this is for “air pollution levels” that have risen. The problem is it refers to “countries” but the task talks about “cities”. This is a slight over-generalization. This is not too bad, but it is safer to say “cities” and not paraphrase into something the examiner may believe is different. The second one is fine.

c) For the same task, choose the best TS for the second question:

1. The government can do two things that will help deal with this problem.
2. In order to deal with the problem, there are two main steps that should be taken.
3. This is a serious problem, and something should definitely be done about it.

**Answer:** The first one is fine. If you write this, it is “safe” that your TA will be good for this paragraph. The second one is not bad, but these steps could be taken by the government, or people, or businesses. With this TS, it is not yet clear. If in this situation you continue writing clearly about the government is fine, if you directly talk about people or businesses, or the examiner has to guess you mean the government, this is not good. The thirs one is not so good.