

Turning a Writing Prompt into a Topic Sentence

Step 1: Read the prompt carefully.

Step 2: Look for key words. If you can write on the prompt, circle and underline the key words. If not, write the key words on your own paper or in your planning area.

- Circle the topic.
- Circle the strongest verb that guides the writing.
- Underline words that show the type of text to write.
- Underline words that show what to write about.

Step 3: Use the key words from the prompt to help you write the topic sentence. You may not need all of the words that you underlined.

Example Prompt

If a visitor came to your school and you were to show him or her around, where would you go? Write a short essay explaining three important places in your school, and why you would show them to the visitor.

Topic Sentence

Three important places every visitor should see at our school are the office, Mr. Jasper's room, and the gym.

My Topic Sentence

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If a visitor came to your school and you were to show him or her around, where would you go? Write a short essay explaining three important places in your school, and why you would show them to the visitor.

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- Step 1** Read the prompt carefully.
- Step 2** Look for the key words: the topic, the verb or verbs that directs the writing, the type of text to write, and what specifically to write about. If you may write on the test, highlight or circle the topic and verb. Underline the words that show the type of text you will write and what you will write about.
- Step 3** Use the key words from the prompt to help you write the topic sentence. You may not need all of the words that you underlined.

Example Prompt

Compare and contrast the audio recording of Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech with its written transcript. Write a paragraph explaining how each medium affects the presentation of the words.

Diagram labels and arrows:

- verb**: arrow pointing to "Compare and contrast"
- topic**: arrow pointing to "audio recording" and "written transcript"
- topic**: arrow pointing to "Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous 'I Have a Dream' speech"
- topic**: arrow pointing to "each medium"
- details to include**: arrow pointing to "affects the presentation of the words"
- type of text you will write**: arrow pointing to "Write a paragraph"

Topic Sentence

Even though both the audio recording and written transcript of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech present the same words, each one has different qualities and advantages.

Turn the following prompt into a topic sentence.

Write a paragraph explaining how forces inside and on the surface of the Earth continuously create and change igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic rocks.

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Step 2 Look for the key words: the topic, the verb or verbs that directs the writing, the type of text to write, and what specifically to write about. If you may write on the test, highlight or circle the topic and verb. Underline the words that show the type of text you will write and what you will write about.

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Example Prompt

verb
topic topic
↓ ↓
Compare and **contrast** the audio **recording** of Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous
"I Have a Dream" speech with its written **transcript**. Write a paragraph
 explaining how each medium affects the presentation of the words.
↑ ↑ ↑
topic details to include type of text you will write

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Turning a Writing Prompt into a Topic Sentence

These steps can help you quickly understand a complicated writing prompt and use the prompt to write a focused, relevant, complete topic sentence.

- Step 1** Read the prompt carefully.
- Step 2** Reread the prompt and mark key words that tell you the topic of the writing assignment, the purpose (e.g., *explain, describe*), the type of text, the length, and any specific information that needs to be included.
- Step 3** Use key words from the prompt to help you write your topic sentence. It may be helpful to include some of the key words in your topic sentence.
- Step 4** Go back and check that your topic sentence addresses all parts of the prompt and clearly explains the topic of your writing.

Example Prompt: You have examined two sources on the Boston Massacre: Paul

Revere's engraving and John Adams' speech at the trial of the British soldiers. Write an essay that explains how each of these sources depicted the so-called massacre. Consider each author's purpose, and identify any differing representations of the facts.

Type of text ——— Purpose (compare/contrast) ———
 ——— Need to include this information ———

Example Topic Sentence: Paul Revere and John Adams depicted the Boston Massacre in obviously conflicting ways.

Directions: Use the steps above to turn the following prompt into a topic sentence.

Prompt: The article “Why Those Tiny Microbeads in Soap May Pose Problem for Great Lakes” explains how small organisms living in the Great Lakes mistake plastic microbeads for food. Write a short essay (2–3 paragraphs) that explains how these plastic beads enter the lakes and spread pollution up the food chain to humans.

Topic Sentence:

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Topic Sentence:

Sample topic sentence: When tiny plastic microbeads in lakes are eaten by small organisms, pollution is spread up the food chain to humans.