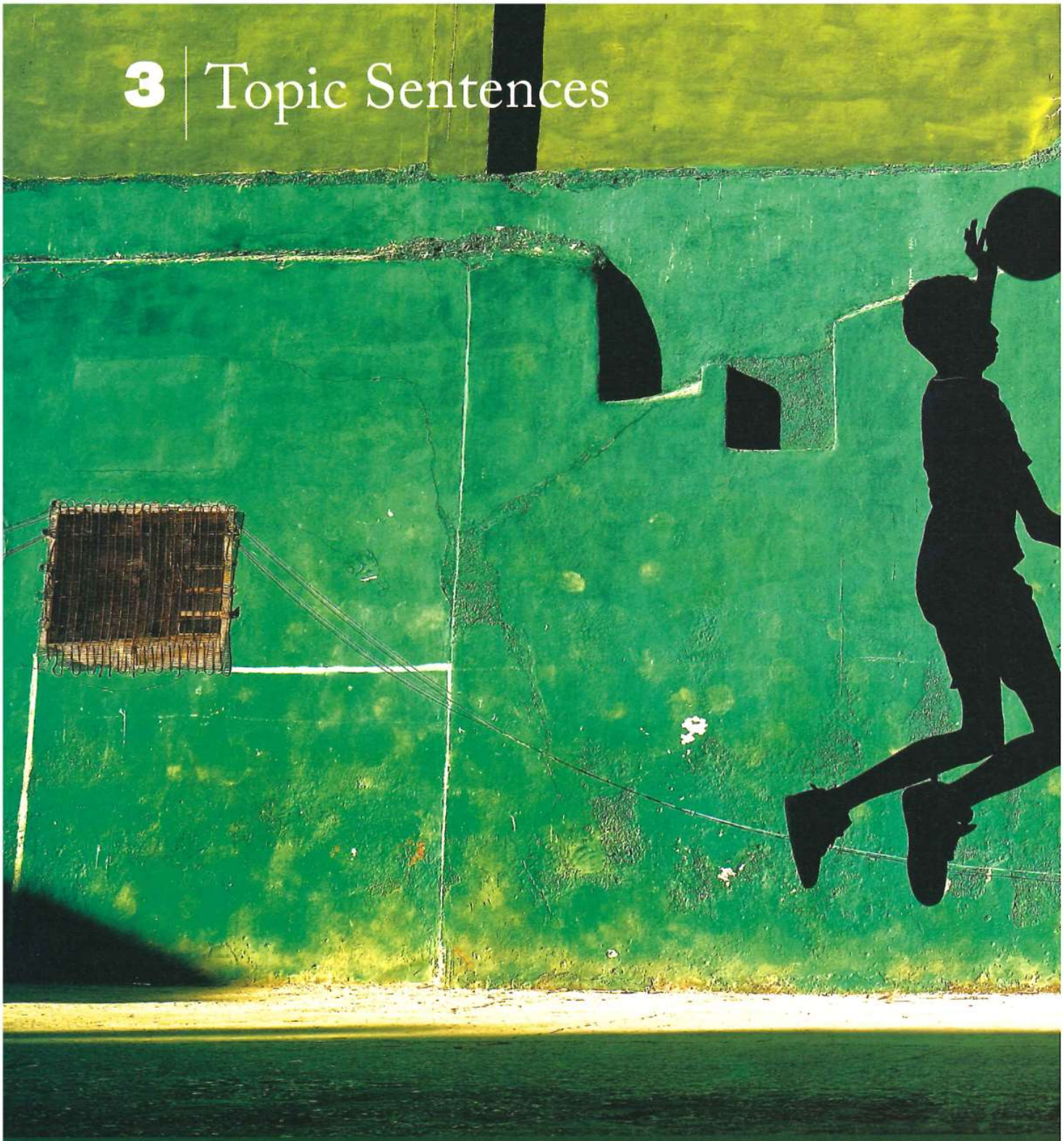
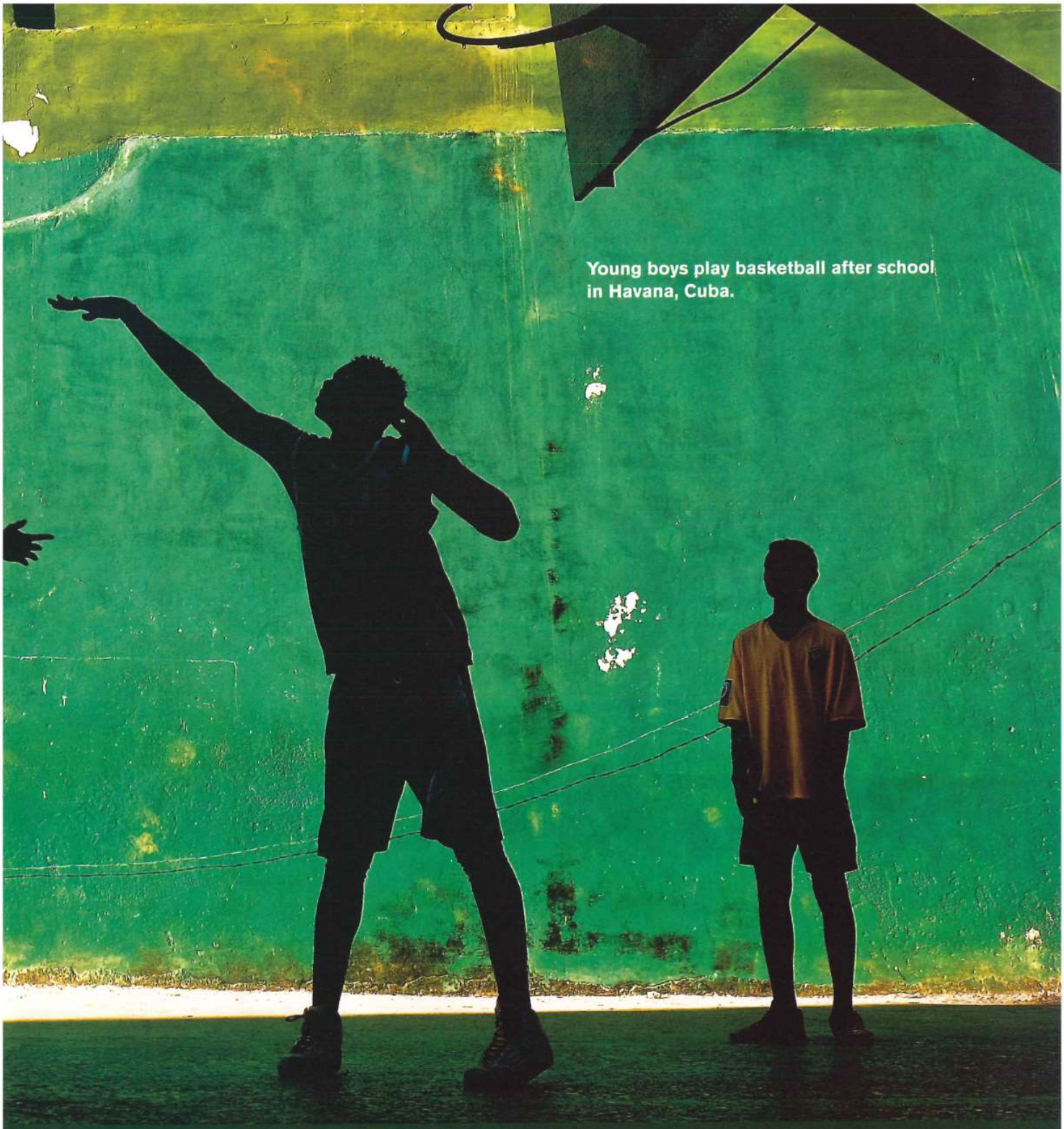
3 | Topic Sentences



OBJECTIVES

- Analyze a paragraph
- Study and write effective topic sentences
- Use commas correctly in sentences
- Identify and write complex sentences
- Write a paragraph



Young boys play basketball after school in Havana, Cuba.

FREEWRITE | Look at the photo and write a story about one or all of the boys. Use your imagination. Begin *Every day after school,...* Write five to ten sentences.

What Is a Topic Sentence?

A **topic sentence** states the main idea of a paragraph. It is usually found at the beginning of a paragraph. A topic sentence has several important jobs. It:

- introduces the main idea
- limits or focuses the topic
- often tells the reader how the information will be organized in the paragraph

ACTIVITY 1 | Analyzing a paragraph

Discuss the questions. Then read the paragraph and answer the questions that follow.

1. Can you name three benefits of exercising regularly?
2. What are three reasons that people do not exercise regularly?

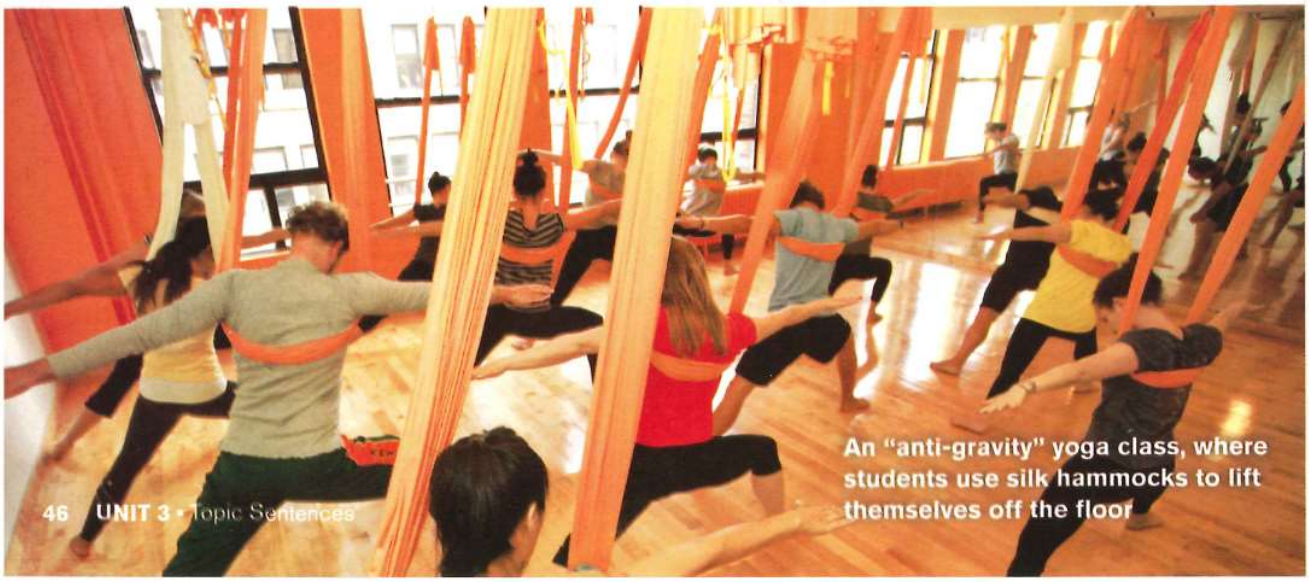
WORDS TO KNOW Paragraph 3.1

climb: (v) to go up
improve: (v) to make better
in good shape: (idiom) having good physical condition
reduce: (v) to make less

PARAGRAPH 3.1

Reasons for Exercise

There are many excellent reasons for exercising several times each week. First, people who exercise look better. Exercise is important to keep our bodies **in good shape.** In addition, people who exercise have more energy. For example, a person who exercises can walk up stairs or **climb** hills more easily. People who exercise have a healthier heart, too. Finally, exercise **reduces** stress and helps you have a clear mind. Too much stress can cause you to worry a lot, and that is not good for your health. For these reasons, if you want to **improve** your health, you should exercise regularly.



An "anti-gravity" yoga class, where students use silk hammocks to lift themselves off the floor

1. What is the topic sentence? Write it here.

_____

_____

2. What do you expect to read about based on the topic sentence?

_____

_____

3. These words or expressions are very important to the organization of the paragraph. Number them in the same order that they are in the paragraph.

_____ finally _____ first _____ in addition _____ for these reasons

4. Read the last sentence carefully. What do you think the purpose of this sentence is? Begin your answer with *The purpose of this sentence is to . . .*

_____

_____

ACTIVITY 2 | Recognizing good topic sentences

Read each set of sentences. Write the general topic that the sentences share. Then check (✓) the sentence you think is the best topic sentence. Discuss your reasons with the class.

1. General topic: winter	_____ Winter is a good season. _____ Winter weather is cold, and it snows. ✓ The best season for children is winter.
2. General topic:	_____ Soccer is popular for many reasons. _____ For a soccer game, players need a special leather ball. _____ Soccer is a nice game.
3. General topic:	_____ There are many people in Los Angeles. _____ People from many different cultures live in Los Angeles. _____ Los Angeles is a big city in California.
4. General topic:	_____ Monolingual dictionaries have only one language, but bilingual dictionaries have two languages. _____ Many language students prefer bilingual dictionaries to monolingual dictionaries. _____ Dictionaries that have two languages, such as French and English, are called bilingual dictionaries.

Features of a Topic Sentence

A topic sentence has these important features.

1. **It has a controlling idea** that limits the topic and guides the flow of the paragraph. The controlling idea tells the reader what you will say about your topic. Here are two topic sentences. The topic is circled and the controlling idea is underlined.

   - (Soccer) is popular for many reasons.
     Explanation: The reader expects the paragraph to explain why soccer is popular.
   - Many (language students) prefer bilingual dictionaries to monolingual dictionaries.
     Explanation: The reader expects the paragraph to explain why this statement is true.

2. **It is not a fact.** For example, "Libraries have books" is not a good topic sentence. The information in this sentence is true, but it is a fact and there is little to say about it.

3. **It is specific.** "Tea is delicious" is not a good topic sentence because the information in the sentence is too general. If you want to write a paragraph about tea, make your topic sentence more specific, such as "Green tea has many health benefits."

4. **It is not *too* specific.** "This dictionary contains more than 42,000 words" limits the topic too much. There is nothing else for the writer to say, so the paragraph cannot continue.

ACTIVITY 3 | Recognizing controlling ideas in topic sentences

Read each topic sentence. The topic is circled. Underline the controlling idea. What information do you expect to find in the paragraph? Share your answers with a partner.

WORDS TO KNOW Activity 3

addictive: (adj) having qualities that make you want to do something again and again
advantage: (n) a good or desirable quality or feature
confuse: (v) to mix up mentally so one cannot understand
educational: (adj) describes something that teaches or involves learning
investigator: (n) a person who tries to learn how something happened

1. (The new test) has three sections dealing with three important skills.

   Expectation: _____

   _____

2. The shocking (crash of the airplane) off the coast of Florida **confused investigators.**

   Expectation: _____

   _____

3. Crossword puzzles are not only **educational** and fun, but also **addictive.**

Expectation: _____

_____

4. Recent research has shown once again that eating dark green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli and cabbage may reduce the risk of some types of cancer.

Expectation: _____

_____

5. Although buying a house may seem like a good idea, renting an apartment has many **advantages.**

Expectation: _____

_____

ACTIVITY 4 | Recognizing good topic sentences and controlling ideas

Read the three sentences. Check (✓) the best topic sentence. Underline the controlling idea in that sentence. Be prepared to explain your selections.

WORDS TO KNOW Activity 4

contribution: (n) what someone does to help make something successful

immigrant: (n) someone who comes to live in a different country

recognize: (v) to give attention or notice to

1. _____ In an English class, most of the female students receive higher grades than the males.
   _____ Research has shown female students like learning languages more than males do.
   _____ Many students like languages very much.

2. _____ Cats are better pets than goldfish for many reasons.
   _____ Cats and goldfish are both animals.
   _____ Cats cannot swim very well, but goldfish can.

3. _____ The people in my office eat lunch from 11:30 to 12:30.
   _____ Yesterday I went to work late, and my boss was of course very angry.
   _____ Yesterday was the worst day of my life.

4. _____ Paul Cézanne was born in France in the last century.

   _____ Paul Cézanne, the father of modern art, made important **contributions** to the history of art.

   _____ Many of the museum visitors **recognized** Paul Cézanne's work immediately.

5. _____ Many Canadians speak French, and some of them speak Chinese.

   _____ The current population of Canada includes **immigrants** from all over the world.

   _____ A large number of new immigrants live in British Columbia, Canada, but not many of them speak German.

ACTIVITY 5 | Adding controlling ideas

These topic sentences are too general. Using the same topic, write a topic sentence with a clear controlling idea. Then compare your sentences with a partner's.

1. Flowers are beautiful.

   Flowers are the best gift to receive when you are feeling down.

   OR Only four kinds of flowers grow during the short summers in Alaska.

2. Cats are nice. _____

3. Paris is the capital of France. _____

4. Reading blogs is interesting. _____

5. Running is a hobby. _____

ACTIVITY 6 | Studying the controlling idea of a paragraph

Answer the questions.

1. Write the topic sentence from Paragraph 3.1 here.

2. Underline the controlling idea(s) in that topic sentence.

3. How is the controlling idea connected to the information in the paragraph?