Topic Sentences

The most important sentence of a paragraph.

What to do?

Perfection

Examples

What to do?

If you were asked to write a paragraph (120 - 150 words) about smartphones, what information would you include in the paragraph?

- Different types of smartphones
- different colours and styles
- the price range
- the history of smartphones
- the advantages and disadvantages of smartphones
- the features
- the apps
- all the functions.

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Clearly, you cannot include all of this information. It would be too much and your paragraph would be like a random list of all things to do with smartphones. I.E. **it would be a mess and the reader wouldn't enjoy reading it.**

So, if you were going to write a descriptive paragraph about the topic, you would need to decide what to include.

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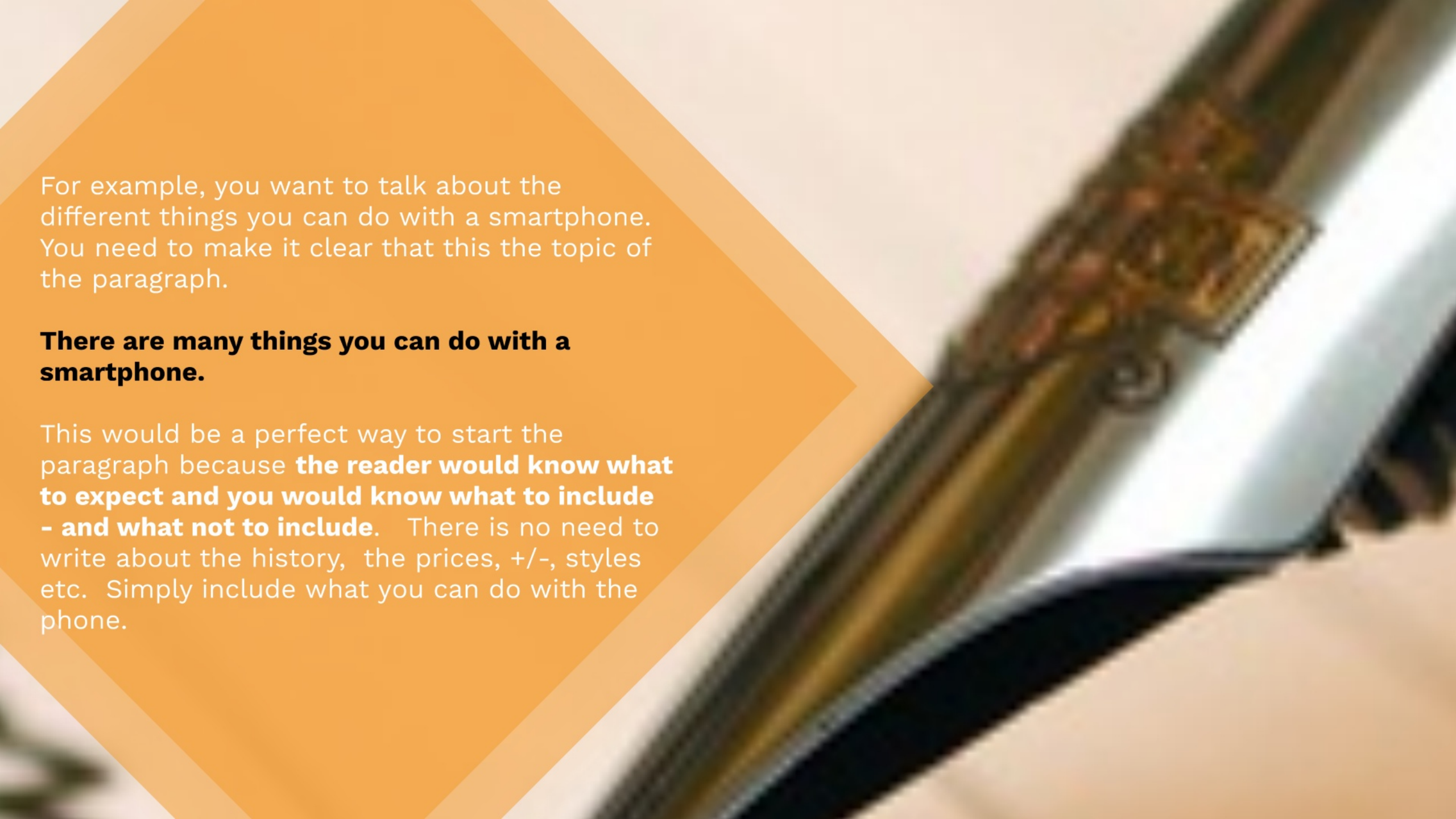- the features
- the apps
- all the functions.

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

For example, you want to talk about the different things you can do with a smartphone. You need to make it clear that this the topic of the paragraph.

There are many things you can do with a smartphone.

This would be a perfect way to start the paragraph because **the reader would know what to expect and you would know what to include - and what not to include**.   There is no need to write about the history, the prices, +/-, styles etc. Simply include what you can do with the phone.

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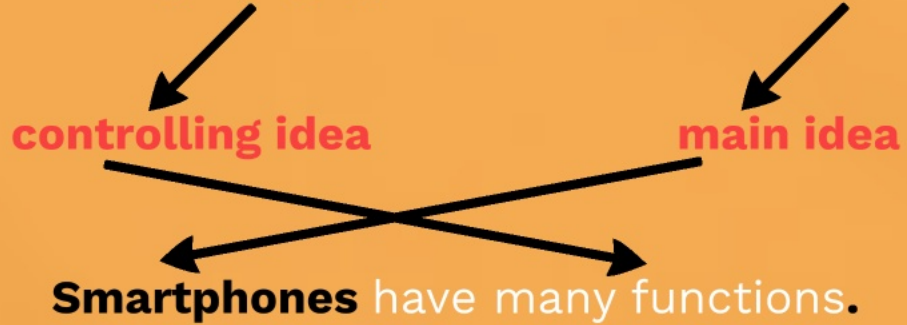- the features
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Step 1

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The topic sentence consists of two parts:
The main idea - the broad topic area.
The controlling idea - what you will write about this topic.

There are many things you can do with a **smartphone.**

controlling idea   **main idea**

Smartphones have many functions.

As you can see the order of main idea and
controlling idea are interchangeable.

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As you know by now, there are three parts to a good paragraph:
- the topic sentence
- the supporting sentences
- the concluding sentence

In order to write a good topic sentence, **you must be clear about what you want to include in the paragraph.** (The purpose will be covered later)

The main idea - smartphones in the previous example - is the easy part. However, **it's the controlling idea that is usually the tricky part**

Too general

Too specific

Good

The purpose

Remember the effect of your writing on the reader – the topic sentence tells the reader what to expect from the paragraph.

Too General

The first topic sentence is 'too general' because the controlling needs to more focused.

The paragraph could contain so many different things about the appearance of a new moon.

The reader wouldn't know what to expect.

And, you would end up writing random bits of information that wouldn't make sense as a whole paragraph.

Examples:

1. The appearance of a new moon is very interesting.

2. Ancient civilisations recorded the appearance of a new moon by making scratches on trees.

3. Ancient civilisations recorded the appearance of a new moon in different ways.

Main idea
Controlling idea

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Too Specific

Topic sentence 2 is **'too specific'** because there is too much detail in the controlling idea. The reader would know what to expect.

However, there is no more relevant information that can e added to support this sentence.

Therefore, you couldn't write a paragraph about this, apart from possibly giving an example/

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Good Topic Sentence

Topic sentence 3 is a good example because the controlling idea has enough information to let the reader know what the paragraph will contain - the different ways ancient civilisations recorded the appearance of a new moon.

This will also help you when you write the paragraph as you now have a clear focus.

You will have a cohesive paragraph containing supporting information for the topic sentence.

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The purpose

The purpose of the paragraph

You can also make it clear to the reader the purpose of your paragraph:

- describing
- giving instructions / advice
- process
- comparing / contrasting
- discussing
- order of events.

You can achieve this with careful wording in your controlling idea.

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Points to remember

Before you write you paragraph, be clear about the information you want to include.

Decide on the **purpose** of you paragraph.

Choose your words carefully when writing the controlling idea of the topic sentence.

Review your paragraph and **make sure all your supporting sentences relate to the topic sentence**.

Some Good Topic Sentences

You try

There are many differences between studying at high school and university. - describe the differences.

These are the steps to follow if you want to get the best out of Instagram. Give advisory steps.

Japanese sports cars are more economical than American ones. Compare and give reasons for this.

It is claimed that A is better than B. Give the reasons for this claim.

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Some Good Topic Sentences

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Now try the Topic Sentence quizzes

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