

Exercise: “Good” and “bad” topic sentences

Peer-review each of the following topic sentences by answering the following:

- (a) Will it be easy to develop a paragraph from this sentence? Why, or why not?
- (b) Are there any ways in which the sentence can be improved?

Hints:

- i) Does the sentence contain a strong assertion that the writer can explain or justify in the rest of the paragraph?
- ii) Does the sentence make the reader want to ask questions which the writer can answer in the rest of the paragraph?

1. University students should not read manga.
2. Manga use pictures and dialog to tell stories.
3. There are many different types of manga.
4. I think that manga are part of modern Japanese culture.
5. My friends and I all like manga so I will write about them.
6. I do not like politicians who criticize manga.

Model answers

1. University students should not read manga.
 - a) Yes. This can be developed by giving reasons why university students should not read manga.
 - b) It will probably be difficult to argue that they should not read manga at all. It might be a good idea to modify the sentence. For example:

University students should not just read manga. OR

Rather than just reading manga, university students should read a wide range of material, including newspapers, novels by famous writers, and non-fiction paperbacks.

2. ✕ Manga use pictures and dialog to tell stories.
 - a) No. This is just a description of manga. It answers the question “What are manga?”, but does not lead to any questions itself.
 - b) The sentence needs a strong assertion. For example:

The special appeal of manga lies in the fact that they use pictures as well as dialog to tell stories. (What is the nature of this special appeal? / Why do pictures have a special appeal?) OR

In a successful manga, the pictures and dialog are not just good in themselves; they interact with each other to produce a satisfying whole. (How does this happen? Can the writer explain this by giving an example of a “successful” manga, or comparing a “successful” manga with a less “successful” one?)

3. There are many different types of manga.

- a) Yes. This can be developed by giving examples of the different types.
- b) It could probably be made a little more interesting by adding a little more information. For example:

There are many different types of manga because there are many different types of reader.

OR

Manga can generally be classified according to the age and gender of the target readers.

4. I think that manga are part of modern Japanese culture.

- a) Yes. This can be developed by explaining why manga are part of modern Japanese culture.
- b) The assertion is rather weak. “I think that” should be removed because it implies that the writer is afraid that it will be impossible to persuade anyone else to agree. It would also be better to explain “part” more clearly, for example by changing it to “an important part.”

5. × My friends and I all like manga so I will write about them.

- a) No. It is clear that the writer has chosen manga as the topic, but there is no focus. We do not know what the writer wants to explain or justify. There are no questions to answer.
- b) If a writer wished to explain the good points of manga in an academic paragraph, a modified form of the second or fourth sentences would probably work. Another possibility might be:

Although some educators and politicians criticize manga, in fact they have many good points. (→ What are the good points?)

6. I do not like politicians who criticize manga.

- a) Yes. This could certainly be developed into a paragraph that would contain the writer’s reasons for disliking such politicians.
- b) It is too personal and emotional for academic writing. The writer needs to express his or her opinion more “objectively” so that readers will think seriously about it. The example given above as an alternative for the fifth sentence could allow the writer to criticize such politicians indirectly by drawing attention to the good points of manga. The example given below, however, would allow the writer to make a critical evaluation of the statements of such politicians:

When politicians criticize manga, we should not accept what they say without examining their evidence and motives. (Why should we not just accept what they say? What might be wrong with their motives and evidence?)