

## Super topic sentences!

**Super topic sentence (S.t.s.)** isn't a term you will find anywhere else; some SVC students made it up years ago to describe a kind of topic sentence (t.s.) that can help create clear structure in longer, more complicated essays like we write in college.

→ **Not sure what a "topic sentence is?** See our Writing Guide "Topic sentences & effective paragraphs."

A **super topic sentence** guides the development of a *unit* or *set* of paragraphs that work together to develop a single, larger idea. When this happens,

- the topic sentence of the first paragraph presents the idea of *the whole unit*—a “super topic sentence”—followed by a second, “regular” topic sentence that guides just that paragraph
- OR
- sometimes the super topic sentence, because of how it is written, works as BOTH the super t.s. *and* the t.s. for the first paragraph
- following paragraphs in the “unit” has its own topic sentence linked to the S.t.s.

This selection from a student essay illustrates how the super topic sentence structure works. (*Only the first part of each paragraph is included, to save space.*)

**S.t.s.→** People cannot be expected to prevent concussions if they do not know what to look for. **t.s.→** The coach is the leader of the team whose primary responsibility is to keep his players safe, but they may not know enough to do so. According to Sarmiento et al., many coaches admitted (in surveys prepared by Centers of Disease Control and Preventions) they did not completely understand ...

**t.s.→** In addition to coaches, it is crucial that athletes receive an education about the ramifications of head injuries. Faure (2010) is certain that a fair number of high school football players are ignorant ...

**t.s.→** Although it is imperative that athletes are aware of what to look for, parents also play a vital role in recognizing concussion symptoms. Cantu and Hyman (2012) insisted that it is ideal for parents to be in-tuned with their child in order to recognize...

**Here's how the student example would look in outline form.** The super topic sentence helps make clear the “nested” levels of topics and sub-topics in a longer essay.

<p><b>S.t.s.</b> People cannot be expected to prevent concussions if they do not know what to look for.</p> <p><b>t.s. 1</b> The coach is the leader of the team whose primary responsibility is to keep his players safe, but they may not know enough to do so.</p> <p><b>t.s. 2</b> In addition to coaches, it is crucial that athletes receive an education about the ramifications of head injuries.</p> <p><b>t.s. 3</b> Although it is imperative that athletes are aware of what to look for, parents also play a vital role in recognizing concussion symptoms.</p>
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Here's another example, from a made-up research project about “disappearing oceans on Planet X.” This example shows the t.s. from a first draft and then the revised outline.

Outline of draft topic sentences (Paragraph 1 would cover both theories—long paragraph!)	Revised Long ¶ broken up; SUPER topic sentence and additional topic sentences used (+ edited t.s. and more sophisticated transitions):
<p><b>t.s. 1</b> Two theories have emerged to explain why Planet X's oceans have begun to shrink.</p> <p><b>t.s. 2</b> Regardless of their differences on cause, Earth and Martian experts agree without reservation that the problem must be solved.</p> <p><b>t.s. 3</b> Most researchers think Zephyr technology is the best idea for stopping the disappearance of X's oceans.</p> <p><b>t.s. 4</b> However, a small but influential group has proposed an alternative solution.</p>	<p><b>S.t.s.</b> Two theories have emerged to explain why Planet X's oceans have begun to shrink.</p> <p><b>t.s. 1</b> Early reports suggested that the cause could be traced to effects of Martian mining beneath the oceans.</p> <p><b>t.s. 2</b> More recently, a theory has been proposed pointing to species shift, resulting from two decades of severe drought, as the explanation for the problem.</p> <p><b>t.s. 3</b> Regardless of their differences on the cause, Earth and Martian experts agree without reservation that the problem must be solved.</p> <p><b>t.s. 4</b> Most researchers agree that the most likely approach to saving Planet X's oceans is development of the Zephyr technology.</p> <p><b>t.s. 5</b> However, a small but influential group of researchers has proposed an alternative solution: thought wave technology.</p>