

## 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.

<p align="center"><b>Outline of draft topic sentences</b> <i>(Paragraph 1 would cover both theories—long paragraph!)</i></p>	<p align="center"><b>Revised</b> <b>Long ¶ broken up; SUPER topic sentence and additional topic sentences used</b> <b>(+ edited t.s. and more sophisticated transitions):</b></p>
<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> <b>Two theories have emerged to explain why Planet X’s oceans have begun to shrink.</b></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>