Placement of Topic Sentences  
What if I told you that the topic sentence doesn't necessarily need to be at the beginning? This might be contrary to what you've learned in previous English or writing classes, and that's okay. Certainly, placing topic sentences at or near the beginning of paragraphs is a fine strategy, especially for beginning writers. If you announce a topic clearly and early on in a paragraph, your readers are likely to grasp your idea and to make the connections that you want them to make.  
  
Now that you're writing for a more sophisticated academic audience though-that is an audience of college-educated readers-you can use more sophisticated organizational strategies to build and reveal ideas in your writing. One way to think about a topic sentence, is that it presents the broadest view of what you want your readers to understand. This is to say that you're providing a broad statement that either announces or brings into focus the purpose or the meaning for the details of the paragraph. And if you think of the topic sentence as the broadest view, then you can think about how every supporting detail brings a narrower-or more specific-view of the same topic.  
  
With this in mind, take some time to contemplate the diagrams in the figure below. The widest point of each diagram (the bases of the triangles) represents the topic sentence of the paragraph. As details are presented, the topic becomes narrower and more focused. The topic can precede the details, it can follow them, it can both precede and follow them, or the details can surround the topic. There are surely more alternatives than those that are presented here, but this gives you an idea of some of the possible paragraph structures and possible placements for the topic sentence of a paragraph.