

## Bi-directional Topic Sentences

Read the entire article (from Hungbo's Gour, in *The Korea Herald*), and then read the topic sentence for each paragraph. Note how almost each topic sentence refers, directly or indirectly, to both the previous paragraph and its own paragraph. Doing this ties the major ideas in the essay together and gives the essay coherence and cohesion; this reminds the reader what was discussed and tells the reader what is going to be discussed.

### What about safety?

by Gary Rector

It seems that virtually everything has changed in Korea during the 35 years I've been here, and most of the changes have been for the better. There's greater prosperity, greater political freedom, more trees and open spaces in the big cities. And though there's more traffic than ever, good public transportation still remains one of the country's best points.

We might even get the idea that safety standards have improved a lot, too. After all, it's been quite a while since we've had news of leaky sections of subway construction, collapsing buildings and bridges, or landslides at apartment complexes with weak retaining walls. The look of horror I saw thirty years ago on the face of one of my co-workers who lived in the Wa-U apartment complex when the building next to his crumbled to dust is now but a faded memory, and most of us have relegated the Sampoon Department Store and the Seongsu Bridge to the back corners of our mental filing system.

Of course, no one likes to be reminded of unpleasant things. We are only too happy to let such incidents become yesterday's news, pass them off with the thought that "things like that happen," and turn our attention to getting on with our own lives. The problem with that is, as the philosopher George Santayana put it, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." All you have to do is take a walk around a residential neighborhood where construction or other outdoor work is going on to get that old feeling of *deja vu*. Fortunately, most of the potential accidents you'll see waiting to happen never do.

My neighborhood offers plenty of typical examples. Time and time again over the years I've seen dangerous construction sites along our side streets where access has not been properly blocked off. Once I saw children playing late at night near a big hole that had been dug for the basement of a new building. What if one of them fell in? The building took up most of the lot, so the construction materials just spilled out onto the sidewalk and into the street, forcing pedestrians to walk out into traffic to get around. Meanwhile, a big sign across the back of the lot read "Safety First."

Construction companies aren't the only culprits. The sidewalk in front of a small warehouse down the street from me, where trucks load up to make deliveries to convenience stores, is almost always blocked with stacks of cardboard boxes, making the sidewalk impassable and forcing everyone, here again, to venture out into speeding traffic.

Other examples abound. Messengers and restaurant delivery men still ride motorcycles down the sidewalk when they are sure they can get away with it and even have the chutzpah to honk at pedestrians to get out of the way. In a strange reversal, cars park on the sidewalk while children play fearlessly in the street. People on chartered buses for holiday trips sing and dance in the aisle while the bus is zooming down the highway.

The tendency to shunt safety concerns aside for seemingly more pressing goals such as staying within budget, getting something done more quickly and conveniently, or even just having more fun is not limited just to Koreans, of course, although I do occasionally hear expats blaming these safety problems on some fault in the Korean character. It's not that simple. Many, if not most, Koreans are just as concerned about safety as anyone. For example, some of the ladies in my neighborhood gathered around a man who was washing his car on a freezing day last winter, causing sheets of ice to form as the water flowed off the car and down the alley. As I inched along, trying to avoid a bad spill, I heard them loudly protesting the danger this was posing to passers-by. The man reluctantly stopped, mumbling under his breath that "Some people talk too much," which is a Korean way of saying, "They should mind their own business."

Anyway, expats who fault the Korean character - the Americans, at any rate - should not pat themselves on the back complacently about their own safety record. Many Americans practice safety measures not so much out of good sense as out of a fear of litigation: They know they're likely to be sued for any accidents they are even indirectly the cause of. Besides, if their record is so great, how come AFN television is always showing those spots about wearing the proper motorcycle gear or about how you're not allowed to mail explosives. I can just see some soldier, disappointed to learn that he will not be able to send Aunt Margie those grenades she wanted for the Fourth of July.

I'm not sure what priority safety is given by most people in Korea today, but I do know from observation that for a good many people safety is not first. Let's hope we can soon figure out a way to make "Safety First" more than just a meaningless motto stuck up on a wall as a matter of form and nothing else.

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