**Identifying Effective and Ineffective Paragraphs**

(Source: <http://www.staff.uni-giessen.de/~ga1047/writing_1/identifying_paragraphs.html>)

***Read the following collections of sentences and decide which ones can be considered paragraphs. For those that are not, why not? In those that are, decide which is the topic sentence.***

1. Spanish is my favorite language. Of all languages known to me, it is the one I like best. In a ranking of the languages of my acquaintance, Spanish would finish a strong first. All others would find lower places in the order, thanks to the fact that the place of honor would be occupied by Spanish, the language that pleases me most of all.
2. Harvey Henderson is the laziest person I know. He won't exert himself at all to get anywhere or do anything. He lives only two blocks from campus and rides the bus every day. Harvey's idea of playing a sport is to turn over the cards in a game of solitaire. Harvey would watch from the couch as his mother carried forty pounds of groceries in from the car. He wouldn't even rise to open the door for her. Harvey will watch a program on television that he hates rather that get up to change the channel. Any physical effort is too much for lazy Harvey.
3. In this report I will discuss the feasibility of co-generators as a power source in our Des Moines plant. First I will explain how co-generators work. Then I will indicate the variety and costs of co-generators now available on the market. And finally I will show how the use of co-generators instead of conventional power could save us approximately $250,000 in energy costs over the next ten years.
4. Computers are getting cheaper all the time. A volcanic eruption in Mexico disturbed the weather two years ago. Spaghetti is not as fattening as people think. How much longer will it be before the Yankees fire their manager again?
5. In the early fourteenth century, Northern Europe was subjected to a terrible famine. Meanwhile, economic instability caused whole kingdoms to go bankrupt. Then in 1338-1350 the worst plague in history ravaged the Continent, killing perhaps half the population. It is little wonder, therefore, that this was a period of profound social and political unrest; the supposedly stable order of feudalism had proved helpless to cope with various forms of disaster.
6. Our friendship was the source of much happiness and many memories. We danced and snapped our fingers simultaneously to the soul tunes of the Jacksons and Stevie Wonder. We sweated together in the sweltering summer sun, trying to win the championship for our softball team. I recall the taste of pepperoni and sausage pizza as we discussed the highlights of our team's victory. Once we even became attracted to the same person, but luckily we were able to share his friendship. Never since then have I had a friendship quite like that one.
7. The idea of a "flat tax" to replace the graduated income tax will, if adopted, be the salvation of our treasury and our national peace of mind. How many hours of hateful sweating over tax forms will be spared! How simple and fair it will be to eliminate all loopholes and insist that everyone pay at the same rate! The only losers will be parasitic tax lawyers and accountants. But since I want to become a parasitic tax lawyer myself, I have just decided that I oppose the flat tax.
8. Many people are seduced by fad diets. Those who have always been overweight turn to them out of despair; they have tried everything, and yet nothing seems to work. A second group to succumb appear perfectly healthy but are baited by slogans such as "look good, feel good." These slogans prompt self-questioning and insecurity - do I really look good and feel good? - and as a direct result, many healthy people fall prey to fad diets. With both types of people, however, the problems surrounding such diets are numerous and dangerous. In fact, these diets provide neither intelligent nor effective answers to weight control.

So, which are and which aren't?

1. Not a paragraph. There is one idea - the author is fond of Spanish - but it is not developed at all. The same thought is repeated over and over again.
2. Yes, this is a paragraph and the topic sentence is "Harvey Henderson is the laziest person I know." The rest of the sentences support this topic sentence - they give arguments proving why one could say that Harvey is lazy.
3. Also a paragraph - I never said they had to be interesting to be true paragraphs. The topic sentence is the first one: "In this report I will discuss the feasibility of co-generators as a power source in our Des Moines plant."
4. Definitely not a paragraph. There is no single idea here. The sentences have nothing to do with each other.
5. Yes, this is a paragraph. The first three sentences are the supporting sentences: famine, economic instability and the plague are examples being used to support and develop the argument introduced in the last sentence, the topic sentence. (Note, thus, that the topic sentence by no means has to be the first sentence in a paragraph.)
6. Yes, topic sentence: "Our friendship was the source of much happiness and many memories."
7. No, because there is not one single idea - the author switches from being against a flat tax to being for it.
8. Yes, the topic sentence is the first one: "Many people are seduced by fad diets." The author then supports that with descriptions of two groups of people who are seduced by fad diets. The last two sentences provide a transition to the focus of the next paragraph, namely that these diets are dangerous.