



WRITER'S STUDIO RESOURCES: TOPIC SENTENCES



What is a topic sentence?

- A topic sentence is typically the first sentence of a body paragraph that announces the main argument of the paragraph. It should relate back to the thesis in some way, and it should also be focused and concise.

Why do I need a topic sentence?

- The topic sentence tells readers what the paragraph will be about. It sets the direction of the paragraph, while at the same time telling readers how the paragraph relates back to the thesis and furthers the writer's claims. The topic sentence also acts as a transitional aid between the paragraphs of a paper, making sure the paper is progressing in ideas and not getting off track with irrelevant information.

How do I write a topic sentence?

An effective topic sentence should:

1. State the paragraph's main argument.

A research paper isn't the place to play coy. You want to let your reader know exactly what to expect from the paragraph, and the topic sentence acts as a sort of "paragraph summary" to give readers a heads up on the upcoming topic.

2. Relate back to the thesis statement.

Your topic sentence should expand on an idea from your thesis statement. Check out our guide on thesis statements!

3. Be engaging.

You want to draw your readers in and keep their interest—the topic sentences are the best way to do this! Having an interesting topic sentence will motivate readers to finish the paragraph.

4. Never be a direct quote!

Although quotes are incredibly useful tools for backing up claims and developing arguments, they shouldn't be used as your main claim or argument. This means they should be saved for use later in the paragraph to add to your claims and ideas. Check out our guide on quotations!

Note! In some cases, not every paragraph will have a clear topic sentence—especially in longer essays where you're discussing the same topic for several paragraphs.



Crafting a Topic Sentence

Let's take a look at an example:

Thesis Statement:

I would argue that, despite the shifting in ways that storytelling is told, oral storytelling is an important part of our everyday culture, and the uniqueness that makes up the oral story is one that will survive, even in this digital age.

Topic Sentence 1:

There is something different in the way we listen to stories in person, and that helps us create bonds with the storyteller.

Topic Sentence 2:

Stories told orally tend to change depending on who is the storyteller—and that is part of what makes them so unique; these changes don't make the stories any less true, or any less real, but they make them part of a more deeply-rooted cultural tradition.

- Notice how the topic sentences focus on one specific idea from the thesis, expanding the idea into its own claim.
- Don't feel pressured to make all of your topic sentences relate back to the thesis in the first draft—the thesis is always evolving, so you can change it later to include any new ideas from your topic sentences. **Your main goal should be using the topic sentences to focus the paragraphs!**

Hint: *If creating a topic sentence seems daunting, try writing the paragraph first. If it is well-developed, the claim should be clear, making it easier for you to write your topic sentence!*