

Topic Sentences

Every paragraph should include a topic sentence that identifies the main idea of the paragraph. A topic sentence also states the point the writer wishes to make about that subject. Generally, the topic sentence appears at the beginning of the paragraph. It is often the paragraph's very first sentence. A paragraph's topic sentence must be general enough to express the paragraph's overall subject. But it should be specific enough that the reader can understand the paragraph's main subject and point.

In an exam, you may be asked to choose a better topic sentence for a paragraph. Sometimes, a topic sentence may be entirely missing from a paragraph and you will be asked to choose one for it. When choosing a topic sentence, remember these guidelines:

- The topic sentence should identify the main idea and point of the paragraph. To choose an appropriate topic sentence, read the paragraph and think about its main idea and point.
- The supporting details in the paragraph (the sentences other than the topic sentence) will develop or explain the topic sentence. Read all the supporting details in the paragraph and think about the ideas they discuss.
- The topic sentence should not be too general or too specific. When considering the options, look for a topic sentence that is general enough to show the paragraph's main idea instead of just one of its details. The answer should be specific enough that the reader understands the main idea of the paragraph.

Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?

Every paper you write should have a main point, a main idea, or central message. The argument(s) you make in your paper should reflect this main idea. The sentence that captures your position on this main idea is what we call a thesis statement.

How long does it need to be?

A thesis statement focuses your ideas into one or two sentences. It should present the topic of your paper and also make a comment about your position in relation to the topic. Your thesis statement should tell your reader what the paper is about and also help guide your writing and keep your argument focused.

Questions to ask when formulating your Thesis

Where is your thesis statement?

You should provide a thesis early in your essay -- in the introduction, or in longer essays in the second paragraph -- in order to establish your position and give your reader a sense of direction.

Is your thesis statement specific?

Your thesis statement should be as clear and specific as possible. Normally you will continue to refine your thesis as you revise your argument(s), so your thesis will evolve and gain definition as you obtain a better sense of where your argument is taking you.

Does your thesis statement include a comment about your position on the issue at hand?

The thesis statement should do more than merely announce the topic; it must reveal what position you will take in relation to that topic, how you plan to analyse/evaluate the subject or the issue. In short, instead of merely stating a general fact or resorting to a simplistic pro/con statement, you must decide what it is you have to say.

Tips:

- Avoid merely announcing the topic; your original and specific "angle" should be clear. In this way you will tell your reader why your take on the issue matters.
 - **Original thesis:** In this paper, I will discuss the relationship between fairy tales and early childhood.
 - **Revised thesis:** Not just empty stories for kids; fairy tales shed light on the psychology of young children.
- Avoid making universal or pro/con judgments that oversimplify complex issues.
 - **Original thesis:** We must save the whales.
 - **Revised thesis:** Because our planet's health may depend upon biological diversity, we should save the whales.
- When you make a (subjective) judgment call, specify and justify your reasoning. "Just because" is not a good reason for an argument.
 - **Original thesis:** Socialism is the best form of government for Kenya.
 - **Revised thesis:** If the government takes over industry in Kenya, the industry will become more efficient.
- Avoid merely reporting a fact. Say more than what is an already proven fact. Go further with your ideas. Otherwise... why would your point matter?
 - **Original thesis:** Hoover's administration was rocked by scandal.
 - **Revised thesis:** The many scandals of Hoover's administration revealed basic problems with the Republican Party's nominating process.

Do not expect to come up with a fully formulated thesis statement before you have finished writing the paper. The thesis will inevitably change as you revise and develop your ideas—and that is ok! Start with a tentative thesis and revise as your paper develops.

Notes from - <http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/thesis/>