

Topic Sentences

Tips:

- If you find that you prefer your paragraph topics in a different order than you listed them in your thesis, remember that you can always change the order of the topics in your thesis rather than having to change the order of your paragraphs! While they need to match, it's up to you which one you change to fit the other.
- If you find yourself struggling to come up with a topic sentence, try writing the rest of the paragraph first. Sometimes it helps to know what exactly is going to be in your paragraph before you write a sentence introducing it.

You may have been told throughout your time writing that any body paragraph in an essay needs a topic sentence—but what *is* a topic sentence? To answer this, we must first explore these three questions:

1. **Where is it?** The topic sentence is the first sentence of each body paragraph. So, unless the paragraph is an introduction or a conclusion, there will be a topic sentence.
2. **What does it do?** The topic sentence sets the stage for the rest of the paragraph. It clearly demonstrates what the paragraph is about and ties back to the thesis.
3. **Why does it matter?** As you keep writing body paragraphs, it can be easy for the direction of your paper to get lost. Topic sentences provide focus for each paragraph and also provide a checkpoint for your reader. Ideally, your reader should be able to look at your topic sentence and see that the ideas presented in the thesis are on track in the paper.

Here's how to write a solid topic sentence that will provide structure to your paper and clarity for your reader.

1. **Look at your thesis.** The topic sentence should tie back to the thesis and clearly let your reader know which part of the thesis the paper is now addressing.

Example thesis: *Gillette's "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" short film effectively uses hyperbole, chronological organization, and the repetition of key images to express the company's commitment towards supporting an empathetic kind of masculinity.*

So, the reader should expect to see a separate paragraph on hyperbole, chronological organization, repetition of key images, as well as an overall discussion on how those devices tie into Gillette's commitment to supporting empathetic masculinity. That's a lot all at once! Fortunately, our topic sentences step in to break down the flow of the paper and walk us through our ideas one body paragraph at a time.

2. **Put the first things first.** “Hyperbole” is mentioned first in the thesis. So, what should our first topic sentence (and therefore, our first body paragraph) be about? That’s right—hyperbole. Your thesis is like a road map for your paper, and your topic sentences are different stops on your map. You want to make sure your paper makes it to those stops in order so that your reader doesn’t get lost.
3. **State where the paragraph is going and be sure it connects back to the thesis.** If your topic sentence does not provide an overview of the paragraph or does not relate to the thesis at all, that is a warning sign.

Example topic sentence: *The use of hyperbole in the advertisement effectively exposes viewers to the aggressive masculinity that Gillette is striving to counteract.*”

This is a quality topic sentence. It goes in the order of the thesis and clearly indicates which part of the thesis that the paper is now discussing. This makes your paper clear and rhythmically pleasing to your reader!

4. **Check—one idea per topic sentence.** Write only one idea per body paragraph, and therefore, only one idea per topic sentence. You can save your next idea for the next body paragraph and the next topic sentence. If there are similarities between two of your topics, instead of discussing both in the same paragraph, you can use them as an effective transition between those two topics.

Now, congrats! You know all you need to write a strong topic sentence! Whenever you write a paper, you can go back through this checklist to make sure that your thesis, paragraphs, and topic sentences follow all the steps above. Do all of the topics in your paragraphs match the topics in your thesis? Does the order of the topics in your paragraphs match their order in your thesis? Do you have just one topic per paragraph? If the answer to all of these questions is yes, then you’ve successfully implemented topic sentences into your paper! If you find you’re having trouble with your topic sentences, you can always book an appointment with the Writing Center, and a tutor would be happy to help you.