**Topic Sentences**

Walden University Writing Center

**Overview**

The best way to understand the role of the topic sentence in paragraph development is to imagine that any given paragraph is a miniature essay that has its own thesis, support, and conclusion. The parts of a paragraph easily correspond to the parts of an essay:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Essay Level** | **Paragraph Level** |
| Thesis statement | Topic sentence |
| Body paragraphs | Supporting details, explanation, analysis |
| Conclusion | Wrap-up sentence(s) |

Just as an effective essay starts off with an introduction that presents the paper's thesis statement and indicates the specific claim or argument that the essay will develop, each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that indicates the focus of that paragraph, alerting the reader to the particular subtopic that the paragraph will provide evidence to support.

A strong topic sentence should be placed at or near the beginning of a paragraph. In addition, this sentence should focus on a specific issue, avoid the use of direct quotations, and leave room for support and analysis within the body of the paragraph. Read on to learn more about creating an effective topic sentence.

**Placement**

The topic sentence does not have to be the first sentence in the paragraph; however, it should come early in the paragraph in order to orient the reader to the paragraph's focus right away. Occasionally a writer may place a transition sentence before the topic sentence, to create continuity between topics.

**Topic Sentence to begin paragraph:**

In the novel *Sula*, Morrison uses the physical bonds of female friendship to propel her characters into self-awareness.

**Transition Sentence + Topic Sentence to begin paragraph:**

However, Morrison does not only use the emotional and spiritual bonds between her female characters to initiate their coming-of-age. In addition, the author uses the physical bonds of female friendship to propel her adolescent protagonists into self-awareness.

**Specificity**

Your topic sentence should be more narrowly focused than your thesis sentence, and you will want to make sure the claim you are making can be supported, argued, and analyzed within the body of your paragraph.

**Example:** In the novel *Sula*, Morrison uses the physical bonds of female friendship to propel her characters into self-awareness.

In this topic sentence, the essayist is arguing that physical bonds of friendship, specifically, make the female characters more self-aware. Because this idea can be refuted or supported by readers (based on how successfully the essayist persuades his or her readers with examples and analysis from the novel), and because the claim is narrow enough to address within a single paragraph, the above sentence is a successful topic sentence.

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<https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/paragraphs/topicsentences>