

Organizing Your Ideas

Topic Sentences

Separating your main points into different paragraphs allows the reader to feel the cumulative effects of the mounting evidence for your claim.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Choose the best topic sentence to begin a paragraph

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Introduce each paragraph with a topic sentence that tells your audience what you will argue in that paragraph. By providing readers with expectations at the beginning of the paragraph, you help them understand and keep track of the overall structure of your argument.
- Each topic sentence should make a distinct point in support of your thesis statement.
- A paragraph should make only one claim and should contain all the necessary evidence for that claim. This is key to making an argument flow smoothly and thus persuading the reader to understand your point.
- Evidence and examples are best used as support within a paragraph rather than as a topic sentence.

Key Terms

- **claim:** A new statement of truth made about something, usually when the statement has yet to be verified.
- **paragraph:** A passage in a text about a subject that is different from that of the preceding text, marked by commencing on a new line, with the first line sometimes being indented.
- **thesis statement:** Often found at the end of the first paragraph of an essay or similar document, it summarizes the main points and arguments of the author.
- **topic sentence:** A statement of the main idea of the paragraph in which it occurs.

When you created the outline, you wrote a thesis statement and then all the claims you are using to support it. You then

organized your research, finding the evidence to support each claim. You'll be very grateful to have done that sorting now that you're ready to write paragraphs. Each of these claims will become a topic sentence, and that sentence, along with the evidence supporting it, will become a paragraph in the body of the paper.

Paragraph Structure

Each paragraph is a self-contained portion of your argument. Each paragraph will begin by making a claim (the topic sentence) that connects back to the thesis. The body of the paragraph will present the evidence, reasoning, and conclusions that pertain to that claim. Usually, paragraphs will end by connecting their claim to the larger argument or by setting up the claim that the next paragraph will contain.

- *Topic sentence*: summarizes the main idea of the paragraph; presents a claim that supports your thesis.
- *Supporting sentences*: provide examples, details, and explanations that support the topic sentence (and claim).
- *Concluding sentence*: gives the paragraph closure by relating the claim back to the topic sentence and thesis statement.

Paragraphs should be used to develop one idea at a time. If you have a lot of ideas and claims to address, you may be tempted to combine related claims into the same paragraph. Don't do it! Combining different points in the same paragraph will divide your reader's attention and dilute your argument. If you have too many claims, choose the strongest ones to expand into paragraphs, or research the counterarguments to see which of your claims speak most powerfully to those.

By dedicating each paragraph to only one part of your argument, you will give the reader time to fully evaluate and understand each claim before going on to the next one. Think of paragraphs as ways of guiding your reader's attention—by giving them a single topic, you force them to focus on it. When you direct their focus, they will have a much easier time following your argument.

Creating Topic Sentences

Every paragraph of your argument should begin with a topic sentence that tells the reader what the paragraph will address—that is, what that paragraph's claim is. By providing the reader with expectations at the start of the paragraph, you help him or her understand where you are going and how the paragraph fits in with the overall structure of your argument. Topic sentences should always connect back to and support your thesis statement.

Things to Avoid Doing in Your Topic Sentence

Referring to the Paper or Paragraph Itself

You needn't say directly, "This paragraph is about..." You don't want your reader reminded that he or she is reading a paper. The focus should be on the argument. This kind of announcement is like riding with training wheels in the Tour de France. You don't really need this crutch, and seeing it in a paper can be somewhat startling to the reader, who's expecting a professional presentation.

Offering Evidence or an Example

"On one occasion, another EMT and I were held at gunpoint." Stick with your claim in your topic sentence, and let the rest of the paragraph address the evidence and offer examples. Keep it clear by stating the topic and the main idea. "Twenty-first century emergency-services personnel face an ever-increasing number of security challenges compared to those working fifty to a hundred years ago."

Not Being Specific Enough

"Cooking is difficult." The topic may relate to your thesis statement, but you'll need to be more specific here. For whom is cooking difficult, and why? "While there are food pantries in place in some low-income areas, many recipients of these goods have neither the time nor the resources to make nutritionally sound meals from what they receive." (Stylistically speaking, if you

wanted to include “Cooking is difficult,” you could make it the first sentence, followed by the topic sentence. It just shouldn’t be the topic sentence.)



Papers: Well-structured paragraphs make your paper easier to understand and more enjoyable for your readers.

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)