



Topic Sentences

A topic sentence indicates the main idea or thesis of a paragraph. Not all paragraphs have clear-cut topic sentences, and topic sentences can actually occur anywhere in the paragraph (as the first sentence, the last sentence, or somewhere in the middle); however, an easy way to make sure your reader understands the point of each paragraph is to write the topic sentence near the beginning. Regardless of whether you include an explicit topic sentence or not, you should be able to easily summarize what the paragraph is about.

Note: Sometimes, faculty ask students to make sure they include a topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph. If that is true for you, you can use this handout to help you craft topic sentences.

The Purpose of a Topic Sentence

1. Alert the reader to the topic or ‘main point’ of the paragraphs.
2. Signify how the writer will approach the topic or main point of the paragraph.
3. Support the author’s thesis statement.

Questions a Topic Sentence Should Answer

1. What is the main point/claim/argument/idea in this paragraph?
 2. How does this relate to your overall thesis/point/claim/argument/idea?
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Examples of Topic Sentences

The following example shows how a **topic sentence (in bold)** can unify a paragraph and how, by introducing the paragraph’s topic, the sentence makes it easier for a reader to follow the main point.

Original: Oranges contain Vitamin C, a vitamin that people widely recognize as helpful in maintaining immunity and fighting colds. The high potassium and low sodium contents in bananas help regulate blood pressure. Apples have fiber, which benefits the body’s digestive system. The antioxidants in blueberries aid the body in many ways, including reducing free radicals.

Revised: **Fruits contain many nutrients and offer a variety of health benefits.** Oranges contain Vitamin C, a vitamin that people widely recognize as helpful in maintaining immunity and fighting colds. The high potassium and low sodium contents in bananas help regulate blood pressure. Apples have fiber, which benefits the body’s digestive system. The antioxidants in blueberries aid the body in many ways, including reducing free radicals.

By adding a topic sentence at the beginning of this paragraph, the reader can better understand the purpose of it. Rather than just listing the benefits of different fruits, it becomes proof of an arguable statement. In other words, the topic sentence gives the paragraph a reason for being.

The example below shows how **adding a topic sentence at the end of a paragraph (in bold)** can give the reader a better context for understanding the paragraph's overarching point.

Original: Often, journal writing is a very personal and private activity. Some people who write journals never share a single word of their writing. Note-taking for a college course is also an act that writers usually undertake individually. At other times, however, writing is explicitly collaborative, such as when scientists co-author publications or when more than one person writes a novel. But even single-authored pieces of writing are frequently the result of many people working together. For instance, publishing writing—from newspaper articles to scholarly texts to movie reviews—undergoes editing and revisions. Receiving outside feedback on a piece of writing is a common and crucial element of turning a good draft into something publishable.

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By adding a topic sentence to the end, a somewhat meandering paragraph is given a definitive direction. It becomes a way of contextualizing and building up to the main point articulated in the topic sentence. Introductions are often organized in this way—starting with more general context that narrows into its thesis statement.

