

Thesis & Topic Sentences

Thesis Statement

A sentence that expresses the main idea or position of a longer composition is the thesis statement. It is located in the introduction and reveals the main idea of your topic. A thesis statement is of crucial importance to a written work. While thesis statements can differ in format and style, some observations are applicable when considering thesis statements in general.

The thesis statement should:

1. Be located in the introductory paragraph.
2. Express a main or unifying idea developed from the information you have gathered.
3. Answer two questions: What am I talking about? Why is it important?
4. Be clear and concise.
5. Develop a new slant or approach on a familiar topic.

The thesis statement should not:

1. Be a simple statement of fact that requires neither proof nor support.
2. Be too short to allow development of complex ideas.
3. Be so broad that it cannot be defended in a short paper (unless an extensive treatment of the subject is planned).

Topic Sentence

A single sentence that expresses the main idea of a paragraph is a topic sentence. The reader should be able to determine through this sentence what the paragraph is about. Usually—but not always—the topic sentence is the first sentence of the paragraph. A topic sentence also helps the writer to focus on one topic rather than wandering into other areas.

Every paragraph does not have a topic sentence. For example, paragraphs that describe, narrate, or detail the steps in an experiment do not usually need topic sentences. This is particularly true of fiction. Topic sentences are useful, however, in paragraphs that analyze and argue. But most paragraphs written to stand alone require a topic sentence to express the main idea. Paragraphs that are part of a longer piece of writing need topic sentences to identify their individual ideas and to relate those ideas to the thesis of the paper as a whole.