

The Writing Center

at
Trident Technical College

- ◆ **Thesis statements** and **topic sentences** help organize the ideas in an essay.
- ◆ Academic writers are expected to use thesis statements and topic sentences.

Academic essays are often organized using the following pattern:

Introduction—the first paragraph of the essay. The thesis statement is usually the last sentence of the introductory paragraph.

Body paragraphs—the paragraphs. Each of these body paragraphs usually begins with a topic sentence.

Last paragraph—Called the conclusion or concluding paragraph. This paragraph should reiterate the thesis idea and wrap up the entire essay to bring it to a meaningful close.

A thesis statement conveys the overall idea of the entire essay and is usually (though not always) the last sentence of the first paragraph of the essay.

THESIS STATEMENTS

- A thesis statement presents your essay's limited subject and your point of view, or attitude, about the subject.
- Think of the thesis statement as answering the questions "So what?" and "What difference does it make?" about your essay topic.
- There is no specific "correct" length for a thesis statement. It's okay if the sentence seems long, as long as it conveys the entire point of your essay.

TIPS:

- Don't make an announcement. Some writers use the thesis statement merely to announce the limited subject of their paper and forget to indicate their attitude toward the subject.
- Don't make a factual statement. Your thesis and thus your essay should focus on an issue capable of being developed as a position. *Your thesis point should be arguable.* If a fact is used as a thesis, you have no place to go; a fact generally doesn't invite much discussion.
- Don't make a broad statement. Avoid stating your thesis in vague, general, or sweeping terms. Broad statements make it difficult for readers to grasp your essay's point.
- Think of how you might answer these questions: "What's the point I want to make?" and "What do I want my reader to know and think about this subject?"
- Another technique for developing a thesis statement is to formulate a question that you will answer in your essay. The thesis statement should not be the question, however. The thesis statement should be the *answer* to the question.



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- Avoid using phrases like “In this paper I will...” or “This paper will examine the subject of...” in your thesis statement. This creates a tone that is too personal for academic writing.
- Once you start writing your first draft, some ideas may emerge that change the original focus of your essay. *After you have written a complete draft of your essay, always check your thesis statement to be certain the thesis reflects the overall main point you’ve made in the essay you’ve actually written.*

A topic sentence conveys the main idea of an individual paragraph and usually appears at the beginning of the paragraph.

TOPIC SENTENCES

- A topic sentence functions as a kind of mini thesis statement for the paragraph, and it tells the reader the main idea of the individual paragraph.
 - The topic sentence usually appears at the beginning of the paragraph.
 - The topic sentence should state the paragraph’s main idea as well as create a smooth transition from the preceding paragraph.
 - Not all paragraphs you read will have a topic sentence. However, using topic sentences is a good way to help you organize your writing and make sure you are staying focused on your main point (as stated in your thesis).
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- Remember to use the topic sentence as a way to focus your paragraph. If you stray from the topic within your paragraph, consider beginning another paragraph that deals with the new topic. When you are editing the draft of your essay, be certain that the topic sentences accurately reflect the content of each paragraph.
 - Sometimes it helps to write a draft of your essay, then go back and add topic sentences to your body paragraphs.



A trick: After composing the first draft of your essay, go back and look at your thesis statement (the last sentence of your first paragraph) and each of your topic sentences (the first sentences of your body paragraphs). These sentences together should completely summarize (express the main points of) your entire essay. If these sentences do not express the main points of your essay, you probably need to revise your thesis and/or add topic sentences to your body paragraphs.

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