



Topic Sentences and Thesis Statements

A guide to writing strong, connected thesis statements and topic sentences

This handout will help you understand the connection between topic sentences and thesis statements so you can use your topic sentences to create your thesis statement, or vice versa. Evaluating these connections will help you with idea development and organization.

First of all, what is a thesis statement?

- A thesis is an argumentative claim. It's what you're proving throughout your writing.

And what is a topic sentence?

- A topic sentence identifies the writer's central idea or argument in a specific body paragraph. A body paragraph then provides evidence and analysis to support the localized argument discussed in its topic sentence.
- In standard American academic writing, a topic sentence is usually located at the beginning of a paragraph, and each body paragraph has its own topic sentence.

Topic Sentences and Thesis Statement Writing Exercises

Sometimes, it can be difficult to create an effective thesis statement that accurately reflects the arguments made throughout your paper. These writing exercises are designed to help you write a strong and cohesive thesis statement that uses the evidence and arguments laid out in your topic sentences. They can also be used during drafting or revising stages.

Exercise #1: Writing topic sentences first, and then using the topic sentences to create your thesis

While writing a first draft, many writers write their introduction and thesis statement first. But in this exercise, write your body paragraphs with topic sentences first, before you write your thesis. This drafting style is useful because your topic sentences contain evidence and analysis that will support your overall claim in your thesis statement. Then, you can use your topic sentences to create your thesis statement.

Example:

- In the example below, the related prompt asked writers to provide a close analysis of one repeated word or phrase in *The Book of Night Women* and to make an argument about why the word is repeated.¹

With the prompt as a guide, here are the topic sentences for each body paragraph:

Topic Sentence #1: The repeated characterization of Lilith as “too spirited” highlights her tenacity and pride, which are unusual traits for the enslaved characters to possess.

Topic Sentence #2: The term “spirited” also connects Lilith to the spiritual world, foreshadowing her potential to control intangible spiritual powers.

Topic Sentence #3: Through these two different meanings of the word, the phrase “too spirited” acts as a pun that refers to Lilith’s character in terms of her determination and boldness, while simultaneously referencing Lilith’s possession of spiritual powers.

Together, these topic sentences could form a thesis statement that looks like this:

Thesis: In *The Book of Night Women*, the repeated phrase “too spirited” in the text acts as a pun, emphasizing Lilith’s characteristics of stubbornness, determination, and boldness as well as foreshadowing her connection to religious spirits through the presence of an undefined spiritual power.

Exercise #2: Using topic sentences to revise an already written thesis

If you already have a full draft, write down all of your topic sentences on paper, or copy and paste them on a separate document.

- Then, look at how the topic sentences interact with your thesis statement. Do they accurately reflect your thesis statement? (All of the arguments laid out in your topic sentences, especially in longer papers, won’t necessarily be included in your thesis. But it’s helpful to analyze how the localized and specific arguments in your topic sentences build the cohesiveness of your thesis statement.)
- Is there something in your topic sentences that is missing from your thesis statement? Or is there something in your thesis statement that you don’t discuss in your topic sentences? These questions can guide your revisions of your draft. If a central argument in your topic sentences is missing from your thesis, think about revising your thesis statement with that argument in mind. And if your thesis contains an argument that is not developed in any of your topic sentences, consider the validity or necessity of that specific argument in your paper.

¹ This abridged prompt is used with permission from Dr. Leuner’s ENGL 147 course.