



Writing Strong Topic Sentences— Tips and Tricks

A topic sentence, the main idea of a paragraph, is key to organizing any paper. Topic sentences should **inform your readers** about what the paragraph focuses on and why that topic is an important step in understanding the entire paper. Useful ways to think of topic sentences are as **mini-theses for each paragraph** or as a main point in an outline. Generally, in order to make the main point clear to readers, topic sentences are **the first sentence of a paragraph**, sometimes also overtaking the second sentence, too.

1) Use words from your thesis in your topic sentences to craft a strong flow and more connections between your ideas. Example:

- *Thesis:*
 - The short story “The Yellow Wall-Paper” proves how horrible and limiting the rest cure could be for women diagnosed with hysteria or neurasthenia.

- *Topic Sentences:*
 - The rest cure proved horrible for women suffering from hysteria.
 - Furthermore, the diagnoses of hysteria or neurasthenia brought their own sets of problems to women.
 - This short story shares the horrors facing women with these diagnoses.
 - The limits neurasthenic women had placed on them made them go more insane.

2) Make use of transitional terms and phrases when moving from paragraph to paragraph. Examples:

- If focused on the *same* sorts of ideas/ arguments/ claims:
 - Moreover...
 - Furthermore...
 - Additionally... or In addition...
 - Firstly... secondly... thirdly...
 - Thus...
 - As a result...

- If moving to *new/ alternate* ideas/ counterarguments/ claims:
 - On the other hand...
 - However...
 - Alternatively...
 - Opposing this fact...

3) Link back to the topic sentence in your paragraph's closing sentence to show a continuity of ideas and help your paper's overall flow. Example:

- Topic Sentence:
 - The limits neurasthenic women had placed on them made them go more insane.
- Last Sentence:
 - Neurasthenic women went insane not from their diagnosis, but from their limiting rest cure instead.

4) Read just your paper's thesis and topic sentences over at the end of writing your paper to see if a clear flow emerges in which you're sharing an organized analysis, summary, or argument. Rearrange paragraphs accordingly. Ex. Looking at the ones in #1, I might rearrange thus:

- This short story shares the horrors facing women with these diagnoses.
 - I can start with a summary of the diagnoses and treatment.
- The rest cure proved horrible for women suffering from hysteria.
 - Then I can go into specifics of the rest cure.
- The limits neurasthenic women had placed on them made them go more insane.
 - Then I can share how the rest cure made them insane
- Furthermore, the diagnoses of hysteria or neurasthenia brought their own sets of problems to women.
 - Finally, I can add how the treatment proved worse than the cure because of the new issues that it brought to these women.

5) Make sure the language in the beginning of your paper is mirrored in your paper's ending (and thus your topic sentences connect not only to your introduction but also to the conclusion of your paper, coming full circle.) Example, returning to our thesis in #1:

- *Thesis*:
 - The short story "The Yellow Wall-Paper" proves how horrible and limiting the rest cure could be for women diagnosed with hysteria or neurasthenia.
- *Conclusion* (Open with a sentence that reiterates the main idea of your thesis, and thus the points you supported with your topic sentences):
 - As this essay articulates, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" shines a light on the horrors and limits women treated with the rest cure experienced.

Other Topic Sentence Resources:

Your own IWU Writing Center Tutors:

<https://www.iwu.edu/writing-center/staff/>

Your professor:

Look up his, her, or their office hours