

Thesis Statements and Topic Sentences

Topic sentences and **thesis statements** are sentences that writers use to **focus their ideas** and **express the main point** of their writing. A strong set of topic sentences will work together to support a thesis.

A **thesis statement** (the main point of a whole essay) is usually found at the **end of an introduction**. A **topic sentence** (the main point of a paragraph) is usually at the **beginning of a paragraph**.

Thesis statements and topic sentences are similar in some ways:

- They are **full sentences** that communicate a full idea.
Wrong: (Not a full sentence) How people can improve employability.
- They should state or **show, rather than announce** the main idea.
Wrong: (Announces) This essay will discuss the importance of learning a new language.
Wrong: (Announces) This section will analyze the benefits to learning a new language.
- They should **not be too broad or too narrow**.
Wrong: (Too broad) Learning a new language is good.
Wrong: (Too narrow) I learned Spanish in high school.
- They **explain** what **the main ideas** are of your essay (thesis statement) or paragraph (topic sentence).
Correct: Learning a second language can be a helpful way to improve your employability, cultural understanding, and ability to communicate when you travel abroad.
Correct: Even a basic language course can improve your ability to communicate abroad.

Thesis statements:

- Help to let the reader know what the purpose or main idea of an essay is
- Outline how you will support that main idea
- Use a path statement to refer to supporting points you will be using. A **path statement** is like a sneak peak at your main supporting ideas. Paragraphs supporting these points in your essay will appear in the same order as they are listed in the path statement.

Here is an example of a path statement:

Taking the time to learn a second language has a lot of advantages, *such as improved brain function, career opportunities and greater cultural understanding.*

- The 1st paragraph will be about improved brain functioning, the 2nd paragraph will be about career opportunities, and the 3rd paragraph will be about greater cultural understanding.

Topic Sentences:

- Help to let the reader know what points you will focus on in a paragraph
- Can be used to stay focused on one topic at a time in a paragraph
- Connect your paragraphs to your thesis.
- **Do not use path statements.**

Once you have a clear topic sentence for your paragraph, each of the sentences in your paragraph should be clearly related in some way to your topic sentence. You can check this by working through your paragraph sentence by sentence to edit any sentences which are not clearly related to your topic.

A good topic sentence of a paragraph contains two elements: **the topic** and the **controlling idea**.

The topic = the subject of the paragraph	The controlling idea = this limits the topic, and shows the reader how the writer feels about the topic/how the writer will limit the topic
<i>Adjusting to Canadian winters</i> This part of the sentence tells the reader the paragraph will be about adjusting to Canadian winters. This is the topic (subject).	<i>has been a real challenge for me.</i> Then it tells the reader that this has been a challenge. This is the controlling idea.

*All of the sentences which follow will be about the challenge of adjusting to Canadian winters.

Without a controlling idea, we are left with an incomplete thought: adjusting to Canadian winters. What does this actually tell the reader? Not too much! It's too broad and it is an incomplete sentence.