

## Topic Sentences and Transition Sentences

SUU Writing Center

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- A topic sentence is the unifying, **main idea** of a paragraph<sup>1</sup>. A topic sentence is often the first sentence in a paragraph or the sentence following a brief introduction.<sup>2</sup>
- A topic sentence should **relate** to and **support** the essay's thesis statement or, alternatively, relate to the point of the previous paragraph.<sup>3</sup>
- A topic sentence **introduces** the details and quotes that you will use to support your main argument. A good topic sentence answers the questions "Why did I group these details together?" and "What am I trying to prove in this paragraph?"
- If someone were to read only the **thesis statement** and the **topic sentences** in your essay, they should be able to identify the **main idea** of the essay and both the organization of the essay and its underlying argument.

EXAMPLE: (From Fall 2008 Scriblerian winner Austin Twitchell's *Band Jocks*.)

**Just because most kids who are musically inclined seem to get good grades doesn't make them geeks.** One of the sad things that seem to be prevalent in some public schools is that if a student gets good grades, he or she is thought of as a nerd and must not have a life outside of school. This generalization and discrimination is one of the reasons why band kids often receive the "geek" label. I have noticed that the majority of students who are attracted to band and enjoy it get above average grades in their other classes. Band seems to create a sort of discipline that is useful in other academics, or maybe the stimulation one's brain gets from making music somehow primes the creator for other learning throughout the day.

TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE HELP WITH TOPIC SENTENCES AND TRANSITIONS.

<sup>1</sup> See the SUU Writing Center tipsheet "Paragraphs" for more information.

<sup>2</sup> Definition adapted from Guth, Hans P. and Gabrielle Rico. *Writing in a Changing World: A Writer's Guide with Handbook*. New York: Longman, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> See the SUU Writing Center tipsheet "Thesis Statements" for more information.

## Topic Sentences and Transition Sentences (Cont.)<sup>4</sup>

- Many times, a topic sentence must act as a **transition sentence**; in other words, it must connect one supporting idea to another. A transition sentence refers to the main idea in the previous paragraph and then introduces the main idea of the new paragraph.
- Key words such as *consequently*, *in spite of*, *while*, *however*, *although*, *like*, *unlike*, *in addition to*, and *another*, often appear in good transition sentences.
- Another way to think about a transition sentence is to realize that a transition sentence acts as a **bridge** between one idea and another. The transition sentence is connected to both the previous idea and the new idea.

EXAMPLE: (Adapted from Guth's *Writing in a Changing World*)

**In spite of the boom in women's sports, a backlash is brewing against Title IX.** Opponents of the law say it forces schools to cut men's programs in order to give women money and facilities they don't want or need. Earlier this year, John Stossel of ABC's 20/20 offered one tale of the ravages of what he called "the equality police." At the Merritt Island High School in Florida, he reported, the boys' baseball team had a stadium with lights, bleachers, a concession stand and fancy scoreboard. The girls' softball team had a field just the other side of a locked fence, with patchy grass and no lavatories. Two softball players sued the school board for discrimination under Title IX... so the school board offered to "unplug the boys' scoreboard, shut down the concession stand and the press box and rope off the bleachers so no one could sit there. That would make things equal (248).

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<sup>4</sup> See the Writing Center tipsheet "Transitions" for an excellent tutorial on transition sentences.