THE PURPOSE OF TOPIC SENTENCES

**Topic sentences convey the main point of each paragraph.**

They show the relationship of each paragraph to the essay's thesis and make an essay's claims clear to a reader.

**Topic sentences are usually the first sentences of each paragraph.**

They clearly point out why each paragraph supports the essay's main ideas.

**Topic sentences deliver an essay's structure and meaning to a reader, so they are useful diagnostic tools to the writer—they let you know if your thesis is arguable—and essential guides to the reader.**
CREATING A TOPIC SENTENCE

Topic sentences may two or even three sentences long. If the first makes a claim, the second might reflect on that claim, explaining it further.

Topic sentences should answer two critical questions: How does the phenomenon you’re discussing operate? Why does it operate as it does?

TYPES OF TOPIC SENTENCES

Complex Sentences

Topic sentences at the beginning of a paragraph may combine with a transition from the previous paragraph. These sentences employ a useful principle of transitions: always move from old to new information.

Example:

Although Young Woman with a Water Pitcher depicts an unknown, middle-class woman at an ordinary task, the image is more than "realistic"; the painter [Vermeer] has imposed his own order upon it to strengthen it.

Questions

A question always demands an answer, so when using a question as a topic sentences, the paragraph or section that follows will answer the question.

Example:

Will blah blah blah when this happens?
TYPES OF TOPIC SENTENCES (CON'T)

Bridge Sentences
"Bridge sentences" (the term is John Trimble's) make an excellent substitute for more formal topic sentences. Bridge sentences indicate both what came before and what comes next.

Example:
"But there is a clue to this puzzle."

Pivots
Sometimes topic sentences don't appear at the beginning of a paragraph. When they come in the middle, they indicate that the paragraph will change direction, or "pivot." This strategy is particularly useful for dealing with counter-evidence: a paragraph starts out conceding a point or stating a fact; after following up on this initial statement with evidence, it then reverses direction and establishes a claim. The pivot always needs a signal, a word like "but," "yet," or "however," or a longer phrase or sentence that indicates an about-face. It often needs more than one sentence to make its point.

Example:
("Psychologist Sharon Hymer uses the term ' Narcissistic friendship' to describe the early stage of a friendship like the one between Celie and Shug") ("Yet ... this narcissistic stage of Celie and Shug's relationship is merely a transitory one. Hymer herself concedes . . .")