FOCUSBING ESSAYS & PARAGRAPHS:
THESIS & TOPIC SENTENCES

Think of an essay as a building: The thesis statement is the foundation and the topic sentences are the framework. These provide structure and focus for the essay, which is built up with detailed, relevant evidence and careful reasoning that fill in that structure fittingly. Without this structure, essays tend to be shapeless, directionless, and sprawling.

Or, say you have a conversation with someone that seems to be going nowhere and this leads you to ask impatiently, “Okay, what’s your point?!?” Thesis and topic sentences are your point, so it’s pointless to write without them.

PART ONE: THE FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY
Go to “The Five-Paragraph Essay” on the menu “Essay & Research Paper Level” in Guide to Grammar & Writing (http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/five_par.htm). Read the section and answer the following questions below:

1. The introductory paragraph must get your reader involved, include the ______ statement, and a transitional _________________.

2. The first sentence of the first body paragraph should include a “_________ hook” tying in to the end of the introductory paragraph.

3. Each body paragraph should include either an argument, ________________, illustration, or beginning/follow-up point and should end, in the final sentence, with a ____________________________ hook into the next paragraph.

   The topic of each paragraph should relate to the ______________ statement in the introductory paragraph.

4. The concluding paragraph should end with an allusion to the introductory paragraph, a ____________________________ of the thesis statement, a ______________ of the main points of the body, and a final statement signaling the end.

DISCLAIMER: Not all essays will or should be 5 paragraphs—After all, what if you have 2, 4, or even 10 points?—but this is helpful when getting a feel for structuring an essay. It is like building a tree house before you attempt a skyscraper.
Name: ________________________  Date: ________________________

ALSO, many experts suggest organizing from the weakest to the strongest point. There are many effective ways to organize.

PART TWO: THESIS STATEMENTS
Go to "The Thesis Statement" on the menu "Essay & Research Paper Level" (http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/composition/thesis.htm). Read the section and answer the following questions below:

5. Many writers think of a thesis statement as an ________________________.

6. A thesis statement is also a good test of the ________________________ of your intent...it’s a matter of ________________________ our discussion to what can be accomplished within a certain number of pages.

7. Why should the thesis remain flexible until the paper is finished?

8. What are two “announcement” phrases to avoid in your thesis statement?
   a. ________________________
   b. ________________________

9. Which of the following is the beginning of the thesis statement in George Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language”?
   a. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief
   b. Now, it is clear that the decline of a language
   c. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly
   d. Meanwhile, here are five specimens of the English language

HINT: Here are a few more helpful ways of thinking about thesis statements. Thesis statements...
   ➢ answer a question directly (whether yours or your instructor’s);
   ➢ make arguable claims;
   ➢ inform your reader what to expect from the paper, what your viewpoint on the topic will be.

For some great examples, see “Creating a Thesis Statement” at OWL: The Online Writing Lab (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owll/resource/545/01/). Also play with the "Thesis Builder" (http://www.ozline.com/electraguide/thesis.html).

Continued.
PART THREE: PARAGRAPH DEVELOPMENT & TOPIC SENTENCES

Go to "Paragraph Development" on the menu "Paragraph Level" (http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/paragraphs.htm). Read the section and answer the following questions below:

10. A typical expository paragraph starts with a _______________ idea or claim (a.k.a. topic sentence) which it then explains, develops, or ____ ________________ with evidence.

11. In the sample paragraph on capital punishment, which two sentences contain a shift in focus? #s __________ and __________.

12. The topic sentence is usually the ________________ sentence of a paragraph, but not necessarily.

13. Which of the following kinds of paragraphs usually need a topic sentence? Circle all that apply.
   a. analysis
   b. description
   c. narration
   d. argumentation
   e. explanation of a process like steps in an experiment

You may want to stop here and check your work with a tutor or instructor before moving on. If you feel confident, move on to the next section.

PART FOUR: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE.

Now that you know the definition and function of thesis & topic sentences, it's time to practice creating your own. If you have an essay assignment you're working on currently, go ahead and use that topic (but decide first if it is expository or argumentative). Alternatively, choose from one of the topics below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expository Topics</th>
<th>Argumentative Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ The most significant differences between high school and community college.</td>
<td>➢ In-state community college tuition fees for illegal immigrants who have lived in CA for at least 5 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ The most difficult obstacles to academic success for the average community college student.</td>
<td>➢ Two major tests versus frequent assessments as the basis of the grade in college-level classes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Step One: Frame your topic as a question. (Ex. What are the most difficult obstacles...? OR, Should the grade in college-level classes be based on...?)

15. Step Two: Write your thesis as a direct answer to that question. (Ex. The most difficult obstacles to academic success are.... OR, The grade in college-level classes should be based on....)

16. Step Three: Circle the topic and underline the opinion or point about that topic to make sure you have both elements.

17. Step Four: List at least 2 key supporting points. (Your essay may have more, but this is just for practice).

18. Step Five: Write each of your key supporting points as a topic sentence with a clear topic relating to the thesis and a clear opinion or point about that topic.

19. Step Six: Have a tutor or instructor at the WRC review your thesis & topic sentences and give you any suggestions for improvement.

20. Finally, type up your revised thesis & topic sentences, and turn in attached to this completed answer sheet. Don't forget to get a signature or confirmation sheet!

Tutor/Instructor Signature

Date