

## Topic Sentences

A topic sentence is a sentence whose main idea or claim controls the rest of the paragraph. It is the sentence that introduces an overall idea that you want to discuss in the paragraph.

### Steps to writing a Topic Sentence:

- 1) **Broad idea /Starting Topic:** 1-5 words describing paragraph's topic
- 2) **Idea to prove:** What are you supposed to be showing with this paragraph? What is the theme/big idea you need to discuss?
- 3) **Combine the two:** write a sentence that makes a statement about the **idea to prove** by using the **starting topic**
- 4) **Polish it:** Add in transitional words/ phrases to create flow, incorporate key words from thesis statement, check for clarity and awkward phrasing, try to sound brilliant.

**Avoid summary sentences.** For example, read this well-written thesis statement:

Hurston symbolizes Janie's independence through her hair in order to establish her claim that one must break free from the control of others in order to experience true independence.

Now look at the topic sentences that begin each body paragraph following it:

- While laying out under the pear tree one day, Janie discovers what she is capable of with her body, being and woman and then experiences her first kiss.
- Once Nanny has passed away and Janie is now on her second marriage, she finds herself in bondage once again.
- Now that Janie is in control of her own life, her final and third husband, Tea Cake, falls in love with her, partly for her independence.

**What is the *function* of these sentences? Do they further expand upon the thesis, detailing what the paragraph will include; or do they tell Janie's life story?** If they tell Janie's story, they are *summary* sentences not *topic* sentences.

Now, what if your topic sentences looked like this instead?

- In her earliest and arguably her most detrimental relationship, Janie is strictly controlled by her grandmother, which is symbolized by the tight braiding of her hair.
- Although Janie attempted to thwart Nanny's control, she found herself under the thumb of one who totally devalued her, partly by making her cover her abundant hair.

- Ultimately, Janie only experiences true independence when she is free to make her own choices, starting with burning the head rags and letting her hair flow naturally.

**Example:**

- 1) **Broad idea /Starting Topic:** monster = role of innocent
- 2) **Idea to prove:** innocence is one side of man's dual nature
- 3) **Combine the two:** The monster's role is as the innocent, which shows one side of man's dual nature.
- 4) **Polish it:** The first moments of the monster's life set him as the archetypal innocent who seems to be doomed to constant victimization by the world.

**You Try** – pick a body paragraph to develop

1) Broad idea / Starting topic: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Idea to prove: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) Combine the two: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4) Polish it: \_\_\_\_\_

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