

The Difference between Thesis Statements and Topic Sentences

Writing a thesis statement:

The thesis statement tells the reader what the rest of the paper is about. A thesis statement is a fact you want to prove or a fact you want to explain. The rest of your paper's job is to prove or explain what you just wrote in your thesis statement.

Example:

There are several ways for college students to improve their study habits.

This thesis statement tells me a couple things:

1. The paper is about **college students' study habits**.
2. The rest of the paper will show me ways to **improve** study habits.

The thesis statement is the big idea of your whole paper! The rest of the paper is facts about how your thesis statement is true.

Writing a topic sentence:

The topic sentence is different from your thesis statement.

The thesis statement tells what the whole paper is about. The topic sentence, however, shows only what the paragraph it is attached to is about.

Let's look at the following example:

Your thesis statement was "There are several ways for college students to improve their study habits."

These are a few ideas of how college students can improve their study:

1. Study in a quiet environment.
2. Pay attention in class.
3. Manage their time well.

All three of these ideas could be discussed further, and they all explain the thesis statement.

What are the ways students can improve their study habits? By studying in a quiet environment, paying attention in class, and managing their time well.

Each of these three ideas can become a **topic sentence**. This means that for each idea, there will be a paragraph that explains it.

Change each of the three ideas into a complete sentence

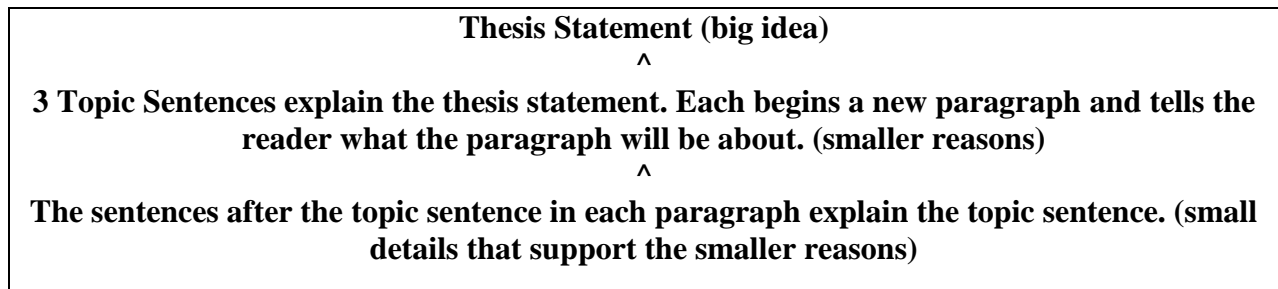
Example: "Study in a quiet environment" can become "**Studying in a quiet environment helps students improve their study habits.**"

Look at the following example:

“Studying in a quiet environment helps students improve their study habits. For example, studying in a quiet place like a library allows students to get away from distracting noises. Also, students are able to think better when they can hear their own thoughts. Students will do better in their classes if they find a silent place to do their homework.”

The first sentence was the **topic sentence**. It told me what the paragraph was about, and the rest of the sentences **explained** the topic sentence.

Look at the following chart to see how the thesis statement and topic sentences are connected.



Remember:

The thesis is the main idea of your paper written in one sentence at the beginning of your paper.

The topic sentences begin each paragraph in the body of the paper and explain why the thesis statement is true.

There is only one thesis statement. There is one topic sentence for each body paragraph you write.

Here is a complete example of how the thesis statement and topic sentences work together in an essay:

Students face many challenges in their college years, and one of those challenges is studying adequately for their classes. Students who struggle finding time and energy to study may feel like there is no solution to their problem. However, **there are several ways for college students to improve their study habits. (thesis statement)**

Studying in a quiet environment helps students improve their study habits. (topic sentence 1) For example, studying in a quiet place like a library allows students to get away from distracting noises. Also, students are able to think better when they can hear their own thoughts. Students will do better in their classes if they find a silent place to do their homework

Paying attention in class helps students improve their study habits. (topic sentence 2) When students are alert in the classroom, they will remember the class lectures better than those who did not listen attentively. Also, students who take good notes in class will not have missing information when they are studying for tests and quizzes. Successful students find that good studying starts in the classroom.

Managing their time well helps students improve their study habits. (topic sentence 3) Students who set a time aside each day for study will give them enough time to get their homework done. Students who choose to party every night rather than work on assignments will not have a chance to meet deadlines. Furthermore, students who use a planner to schedule their homework time will have a better idea of what they need to do to succeed.

In conclusion, many options are available to students who truly want to develop better study skills. Studying is not an easy activity, and it takes planning, determination, and attentiveness to study well. Fortunately, students who apply themselves to these study techniques will be happy with the results.

EXERCISE:

Write what you know about thesis statements and topic sentences in your own words.

How are they similar?

How are they different?

Where does the topic sentence go?

How many thesis statements are there? _____

How many topic sentences are there? _____