

Topic sentences & writing effective paragraphs

This information on this Writing Guide will help you understand what's expected in paragraphs and topic sentences in college-level writing:

- the structure and qualities of effective paragraphs and
- what topic sentences are and how they work.

Structure and qualities of effective paragraphs

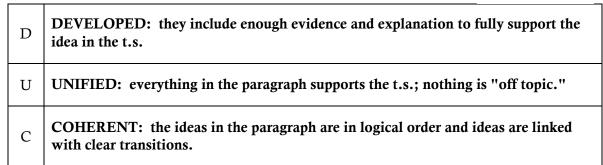
Effective essay **body paragraphs** follow a careful structure:

- Each paragraph (¶) should have a clear topic sentence, which communicates the paragraph's focus idea. *See more on topic sentences, below!*
- The topic sentence should be developed with (or "supported" by) evidence and explanations.
- Sometimes the paragraph will end with a "clincher" or concluding sentence.

An effective paragraph has the three qualities. A handy way to remember them is to remember **DUC**–which isn't how "duck" is spelled, but it works to help you remember!



Qualities of effective paragraphs (DUC): they are



(Effective essays meet these three qualities, too-just replace "topic sentence" with thesis.)

Effective topic sentences create clarity in essays

How to write effective topic sentences (t.s.) is one of the most important skills to develop as a college writer. The table below is a crucial overview of topic sentences and how to use them.

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| What is a topic sentence (t.s.)? | A topic sentence articulates the focus idea of a paragraph in the same way a thesis articulates the focus idea of a whole essay. Clear, well-placed topic sentences guide the reader by clearly indicating what idea is being presented and how it relates to the ideas it follows. Missing or misplaced topic sentences can make an otherwise well-organized essay seem mysterious or confusing. The topic sentence is developed in the paragraph with evidence-usually several pieces of evidence, often from sources-and explanation of the evidence. |
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| Where is a topic sentence placed? | Usually, an effective topic sentence in academic writing is the first sentence in the paragraph. There is no actual "rule" about where the topic sentence must placed, BUT the first-sentence position will provide maximum clarity in your essay. |
| How does an effective topic sentence work? | Topic sentences have three key functions or "jobs": they present the focus for the paragraph provide a direct link to the thesis, and (in most cases) provide transition from the preceding paragraph. Specific wording to make topic sentences effective depends on what type of essay they are part of-be these three functions apply in all cases. |
| How can you apply this to your essay drafts? | Review your draft to analyze how well the topic sentences are working. If a t.s. is missing, write one! If it's in the middle or at the end of the paragraph, move it up to the beginning. If it's too general, revise to make it more specific. If a t.s. doesn't include a transition and the essays needs one, revise to include it. See our Writing Guide "Thesis + topic sentences outline exercise" for a great way to do this analysis! |

