

Your Thesis Statement or Topic Sentence

Opening Lesson – The Paragraph or Essay Prompt

The very first part of your essay is relating your topic sentence to the original prompt. The **prompt** is the statement or question that is given to you to write about or to answer.

Some prompts come in the form of statements:

Write about three ways that students can handle stress better.

Give advice to a new, scared college student as to why he or she should stay in college.

For a statement, the best way to respond is to turn it into a question so that you can answer the question:

Try this with the two statements we have addressed:

Write about three ways that students can handle stress better.

Give advice to a new, scared college student as to why he or she should stay in college.

They can also come in the form of questions:

What are three strategies that students can use to write better essays?

Since the question is already made, you can answer the question with your writing.

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Part A--Understanding Questions and Statements

The "thesis statement" for an essay or "topic sentence" for a paragraph is basically **the answer to the question you have been asked**. It is a very **general** statement for your essay or paragraph. In fact, it is **the most general statement** in your writing, which will be explained later with more specific information.

We answer questions all the time and do not realize that in our answer, we are creating a topic sentence.

For example, when someone asks us, "**What is your favorite color and why,**" we can formally respond with, "My favorite color is blue because I really like the sky in the morning."

We have created a **statement** from the question that we were given. This statement is a complete sentence with the ideas of the question repeated. It is general because it gives the reason but no details yet.

Try to create a statement **in a complete sentence** to answer these simple questions:

What is your favorite food? _____

What are two of your favorite foods?

What are your three favorite school subjects?

Please share your answers with someone in your group.

Part B--Topic Sentence vs. Thesis Statement

As mentioned before, a topic sentence and a thesis statement are both complete sentences that answer the question you were asked.

There are two parts to both the thesis statement and the topic sentence:

The topic and the controlling idea

Let's look at this sentence:

Three of the best classes in college are math, physics, and English.

For this sentence, we should first know what question we were asked.

What do you think the original question was?

Now that we know the original question, we should know that the **topic** is the formation of the question into a statement. **Three of the best classes in college are** is your topic. The **controlling idea** is made up of your **points**. **Math, physics, and English** in the same sentence is your controlling idea.

Knowing that a thesis is for an essay and a topic sentence is for a paragraph, do you think this can be used as a thesis statement, topic sentence, or both? _____

If you are writing one academic paragraph, you will use a **topic sentence with two or three points**. It will most likely be the first sentence of your paragraph (or the second, if you have an introductory sentence).

If you are writing a multi-paragraph essay, your thesis statement usually be at the end of your introductory paragraph.

Why do you think a paragraph needs a topic sentence or an essay needs a thesis statement?

Part C--Writing a Topic Sentence or Thesis Statement

Now, it's your turn:

Please answer these questions in a topic sentence or a thesis statement then share your sentences with your group:

SPECIAL NOTE: If your question is a "what are" question, then your question will start with the part after the "what are". For example, the first question is, "What are three ways students can handle stress?"

Your thesis or topic sentence will start with "Three ways students can handle stress are...."

If it is a why question, your answer should include "because" before the points. If it is a yes/no question, your thesis is the direct answer to that question (Should students eat apples? Students should eat apples).

Now try these:

What are the best ways to study for a test?

What things should Palomar College change to be a better college?

Why is college important for the future?

Is college important for the future?

Part D--Placing your topic sentence or thesis statement

After you know your topic sentence, you could have an introductory sentence to start your paragraph. Some professors want one, some do not.

After you know what your thesis statement is, then you start your essay.

Leading up to the thesis, you must have an introductory sentence, background about the topic, a transition into your thesis, then your thesis.

Pick one of the questions in Part C and create an introductory sentence before your topic sentence (levels 4-55) or an introduction paragraph for your thesis (levels 101-103 and higher)

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Part E—Closed Thesis vs. Open Thesis (Levels 102 and higher)

When writing your thesis, in ESL 101, you were taught to show your points. For example, when asked a question like:

What are three ways students can handle stress better?

your thesis would have been something like:

The three ways students can handle stress better are eating more fruit, breathing deeply and sharing their feelings with friends.

This is called a **closed thesis** because it shows all of your points in the thesis.

However, in higher levels, many professors do not prefer a closed thesis since they want to see the points made in the body paragraphs, rather than displayed in the thesis.

As a result, the **open thesis** shows a **common idea** between the points and displays that idea as the controlling idea instead of the individual points.

Therefore, your open thesis, based on the same question might be:

Students can handle stress better by using three important methods that can improve their inner health.

Now, let's try to create an open thesis as an answer to the question you have chosen.