What is a Thesis? What is a Topic Sentence? How are They Related?
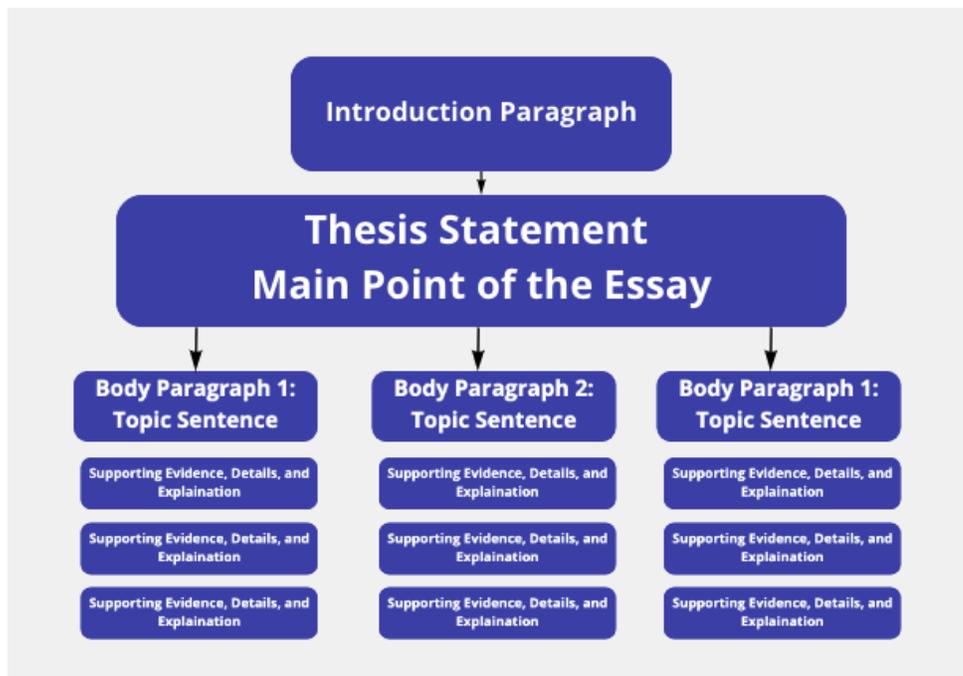
A **thesis statement** is written to state the main purpose or argument of your writing. That means that your thesis statement will be supported through all of the body paragraphs that make up your essay. A **topic sentence** is the first sentence of a body paragraph. This sentence indicates for your reader how the paragraph will support your thesis. That means that the topic sentence embodies what your paragraph says and shows how it is related to your thesis statement.

This means that your topic sentences should...
- indicate how your paragraph will support one idea of your thesis statement.
- indicate the main focus of that paragraph in relationship to the thesis.
- be the first sentence of your paragraph (or close to the first sentence of the paragraph) prior to the supporting evidence that also appears in your paragraph.

Why this matters?

Understanding the thesis statement/topic sentence relationship helps you construct an organized, focused essay that consistently supports your thesis statement. The graphic below can be helpful for us as we visualize this relationship in our own writing:

As the above graphic illustrates, the topic sentence is connected to the thesis statement. Using topic sentences like this can help writing stay focused. Notice that the arrows point directly from the thesis statement to each paragraph; this suggests that the paragraph will speak in support of the thesis, rather than talking about a side-topic or going off on a tangent accidently in one of your paragraphs.

Effective vs. Ineffective Topic Sentences Examples

A student is writing a persuasive essay about snow mobile use in Sequoia National Park. Their thesis statement is: "Because snow mobiles create both noise and air pollution, snow mobiles should be banned from Sequoia National Park."

One of their body paragraphs will focus on how the snow mobiles cause significant pollution that the National Park Service cannot afford to remedy. The student drafts two possible topic sentences for that paragraph, but one is stronger than the other.

- Topic Sentence Option 1: It may be hard to imagine that 1,100 snow mobiles a day could cause an air pollution problem half the size of Connecticut, but in fact, they can, and the parks cannot afford to correct it.

- Topic Sentence Option 2: According to Jim Smith, snow mobiles can cause air pollution problems half the size of Connecticut.

The first sentence would work as a topic sentence. As a reader, we can tell that the paragraph will further explain why the parks cannot afford to support snow mobile pollution. It directly relates to the thesis, and demonstrates how the paragraph will support the thesis statement. The second topic sentence is connected to the thesis in terms of topic; however, it is not argumentative or persuasive like the thesis. Instead, it states a fact/statistic without connecting it to the thesis statement.

For more practice, check out the Purdue University website:
https://owl.purdue.edu/engagement/ged_preparation/part_1_lessons_1_4/index.html