A topic sentence is simply the first sentence of each paragraph in the main body of an essay. A topic sentence tells the reader what that paragraph is about. Another way to think about a topic sentence is as a mini thesis.

“Topic sentences are important not only because they create a structure for the essay but also because they help the reader understand what each paragraph is about.”

Now that sentence is a topic sentence! As I begin to qualify that sentence, my reader will already know what point I am going to prove and not worry about digging through my paragraph to find my main point. Your essay should already have a main claim or argument; your topic sentences are just mini claims or theses that show what each paragraph is trying to prove or show.

Some tips for writing topic sentences:

• Identify topic sentences as you re-read and revise your draft. Mark them with a highlighter. Then go back over the paper and see if the highlighted sentences make a “path” —a step-by-step guide—through the paper.

• Once you finish writing each paragraph, consider each of its sentences. You might find that the last sentence in your paragraph is the best topic sentence.

In writing a topic sentence, avoid mere observation, a simple statement of fact:

The weather is warm here in July.

doesn’t give the paragraph any direction.

Instead, make a claim that ties into your paper’s overall thesis:

The usual warm weather of July seems even warmer this year.

offers a way for the paragraph to prove a point with illustrations or data—or even develop an argument.