

DEVELOPING TOPIC SENTENCES

A **topic sentence** is a statement of the central unifying idea of a paragraph, which, like a thesis (the central unifying idea of the essay), consists of a subject and a controlling idea (an arguable opinion about the subject). A topic sentence can appear anywhere in the body paragraph, but it is most likely to be the first sentence.

After you've drafted an essay, you can develop or revise topic sentences using the following method:

1. Read the first body paragraph (the paragraph after the introduction). Underline phrases or sentences in which you state an argument. (Do not underline the facts that help illustrate or prove an argument.)
2. Ask yourself if these argumentative statements you have underlined are related. How are they related? Do they all go to prove the same point? Or do the statements build on each other in order to prove a larger argument? These argumentative statements make up the overall argument of the paragraph. Write down in the margin a sentence that explains what the overall argument of the paragraph is. This is the **topic sentence** of the paragraph.
3. Ask yourself how this topic sentence relates to the thesis of your essay. If necessary, revise the topic sentence to include an explanation of how the overall paragraph argument helps to prove the essay's thesis.
4. Narrow the subject and controlling idea of your topic statement, just as you would when revising your thesis, to reflect the argument of the paragraph.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 until you've written a topic sentence for each body paragraph in your essay.

For more information on the writing and placement of topic sentences, read "Using a topic sentence" (pages 115-116) in Chapter 8, "Structuring Paragraphs" in *The New Century Handbook*.