

## Topic Sentences

### What is a Topic Sentence?

Located at the beginning of a paragraph, a topic sentence forecasts the scope, purpose, and content of a paragraph. Topic sentences often make an assertion that is supported by the rest of the paragraph.

### Sample Paragraph:

The writer *expands* on the topic sentence by describing Gibney's audience.

The writer *supports* the topic sentence with two pieces of evidence: 1) Gibney's use of commentary, 2) Gibney's highlighting of similarities between Holmes and other Silicon Valley icons.

Alex Gibney created the HBO documentary *The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicon Valley* to illustrate how Elizabeth Holmes, the founder of the fraudulent blood-testing company Theranos, managed to fool the public for so long. Although Gibney likely knew that most HBO viewers would already be familiar with Theranos's demise by the time the film debuted, he also probably expected them to wonder how such blatant fraud went undetected and unchecked. As a result, Gibney used commentary from journalists who promoted Holmes and ex-employees from Theranos in order to illustrate the company's enigmatic appeal. Similarly, he highlighted similarities between Holmes and other cult personalities in Silicon Valley in order to provide cultural context for the support Holmes attracted. In other words, while Gibney primarily focused on Holmes and Theranos, he used their story to demonstrate how Silicon Valley start-up culture was uniquely susceptible to fraud.

The underlined topic sentence tells the reader that the rest of the paragraph will be about Gibney's illustration of the circumstances that allowed Holmes's company to defraud the public.

The final sentence hints at a new idea: Silicon Valley start-up culture facilitates fraud. This new idea may form the basis of the paragraph that follows this one.

### Tips for Writing Strong Topic Sentences:

- Think of the topic sentence as a contract with the reader; it lets the reader know what to expect in the paragraph that follows. The topic sentence acts as a thesis for the paragraph.
- Think about the role of the paragraph in the paper as a whole—how does this paragraph connect to previous paragraphs (if previous paragraphs exist) and the thesis for the paper as a whole? Using transition words or phrases can help create connections with a previous paragraph, and using key terms or subjects from the thesis statement can link to the paper's overall purpose.
- Avoid overly broad or overly detailed statements.
- If a topic sentence contains a list, ideas in the paragraph should appear in the order they are listed.
- If you're having trouble drafting a topic sentence that reflects the purpose and content of a given paragraph, reevaluate the other sentences in the paragraph. Would any fit better in a different paragraph? Do you have enough information to split one paragraph into two paragraphs?