

THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

at **Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY

Topic Sentences

The most effective way to organize an academic paper is to separate particular points into paragraphs. To help your audience follow the progression of your ideas, you may choose to include topic sentences for each paragraph. A topic sentence communicates the specific point of a paragraph.

Topic Sentences Can Help Your Audience Understand These Things:

1. The point, or topic, of a paragraph
2. How the paragraph relates to the thesis for the entire paper
3. How the paragraph relates to the paragraph before it

Example Thesis: *“Creamy peanut butter is better than crunchy peanut butter.”*

To explain his thesis, the author of this paper will use two major points. Each point will appear in its own paragraph. To indicate to his reader how his argument will use the two points, the author provides the following “preview” of the essay’s content:

Example Preview (in introduction): *“Because pieces of peanut can make spreading more difficult and because even those who prefer crunchy can accept creamy, whereas the reverse is not as common...”*

This preview establishes three things: the major points of the essay (spreadability and acceptability); the order in which the points will appear in the body of the essay (spreadability, then acceptability); and the relationship between the major points (accumulation; they are distinct points that, together, support the essay’s thesis).

Example Topic Sentence, first body paragraph: *“One way that creamy peanut butter is better than its crunchy counterpart is spreadability.”*

The paragraph will discuss how bits of solid peanut can tear up softer breads. The author will provide information from studies that support his claim. Everything in the paragraph will tie into the issue of spreadability, and the reader will understand that spreadability is the central concern of the paragraph because of the topic sentence.

Example Topic Sentence, second body paragraph: *“Creamy peanut butter is also superior to crunchy peanut butter in the area of acceptability.”*

This paragraph is going to support a claim that creamy peanut butter is found more acceptable to all sandwich eaters, even those who prefer crunchy. The author has all the statistics needed to back that up. The paragraph will offer a detailed analysis of the acceptability factor. The topic sentence again makes the paragraph’s central point clear.

Select information taken from
Lunsford, Ronald F. and Bill Bridges. *The Longwood Guide to Writing*, p. 64.