

## Topic Sentences

GRS Writing Group – WED 18 OCT 2017

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*The curse of knowledge: you've forgotten what it's like not to know what you know.*

- Thesis Whisperer <https://thesiswhisperer.com/2014/07/09/the-zombie-thesis/>

While we write in sentences, readers attempt to understand our 'story' using bigger units of text. If our sentences read well in isolation but the intention of the bigger units is not clear, readers will need to 'work hard' to determine our intention. We need to understand how the big units of our writing fit together to

- make the text easier to read
- ensure the reader interprets our text in the way we intended.

Topic sentences play an important role in reader comprehension of our 'story'. The 'white space' we add between paragraphs signals to the reader that we are moving from one topic to the next. Readers need to understand what topic the new paragraph focusses on and understand how the paragraph fits with the preceding paragraph(s). This is the function of the topic sentence.

Some paragraphs do not need topic sentences. These include:

- introductory paragraphs which often act as 'topic paragraph' for the whole text
- serial paragraphs which refer back to a single topic

You can use a reverse outline as a diagnostic strategy to show whether your text has a clear 'story'.

When you revise your text in this way you can check that

- your topic is identified early in the topic sentence
- the topic sentence is the first sentence of the paragraph (there are exceptions)
- each sentence in the paragraph 'fits' with the topic
- there is a link between adjacent paragraphs

You can also create a 'tiny text' by combining all of your topic sentences to assess the 'story' you are telling.

If you begin writing your text with a list of topics, you may wish to consider creating a ‘red thread’ narrative instead.

List	Red Thread
Methods chapter	This research uses action research because:
Action research	We wanted to research and manage the change at the same time, we can't afford a lengthy failed experiment
Cycle One	We needed an emergent design so we could adjust what we were doing as we went along, hence AR
Reflection and use of diaries	We looked at three types of action research. We are doing participatory research.
Cycle Two	We opted for PAR because it allows many people to do the planning and data analysis; this creates ownership, spreads the learning
Analysis	We have used diaries and discussion for reflection and thematic analysis of artefacts and interviews.

#### Science/applied science

1. W is a problem, especially in situation A, when B and C, the things that cause W, are exacerbated by Z.
2. To date, research has aimed at eliminating Z, but this is not possible in situations M and N.
3. So we are trying to defuse the effects of Z by making use of enzymes in the body that could reduce the B and C effects through function F.

These examples are taken from Patter - Writing thesis chapters? Beware ‘blocky’ writing:  
<https://patthomson.net/2016/10/24/writing-thesis-chapters-beware-blocky-writing/>

Doctoral Writing Special Interest Group Rash promises: Three lessons learned applicable to doctoral writing  
<https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/?s=topic+sentences&search=Go>



General advice about topic sentences & paragraphs

Wiki How to Write a Good topic sentence

<https://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Good-Topic-Sentence>

ThoughtCo - Teaching Topic Sentences using Models

<https://www.thoughtco.com/topic-sentence-examples-7857>

Explorations of Style - Paragraphs

<https://explorationsofstyle.com/2011/02/16/paragraphs/>



Useful Tools

Explorations of Style – Reverse Outlines

<https://explorationsofstyle.com/2011/02/09/reverse-outlines/>

Explorations of Style – Topic Sentence Paragraphs

<https://explorationsofstyle.com/2014/10/15/topic-sentence-paragraphs/>

Pat Thomson Patter. Writing Thesis Chapters? Beware 'blocky' writing

<https://patthomson.net/2016/10/24/writing-thesis-chapters-beware-blocky-writing/>

Next session: WED NOV 8 Colons, Semi-colons and Hyphens

Further details of the UWA GRS Writing Group, including advice sheets to download, here:

[www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/communities#writinggroup](http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/communities#writinggroup)