

Topic Sentences, Transitions, and Evidence

English 1406/13/23 Workshop

Basic principles of topic sentences

- a mini-thesis statement, it tells your reader what you are going to prove in the paragraph
- in short papers, it should be connected in some meaningful way to the thesis statement, generally through a key word or phrase
- in long papers where you might develop an idea over several paragraphs, it should be clearly connected to the specific idea you are developing, generally through key words or phrases
- in all cases, it should be connected in some meaningful way to the paragraph before it (i.e., with a transition)
- all sentences in the paragraph should refer back to it in a fairly clear way: otherwise, they are off topic

Topic Sentence DOs

- do make topic sentences argumentative
- do bring key words or phrases from the thesis statement into your topic sentences
- do connect the topic sentence to the paragraph before it with a transition
- do use key words or phrases from the topic sentence to connect the ideas within your paragraph

Topic Sentence DON'Ts

- don't generalize in your topic sentences
 - avoid generalizations as topic sentences: "Love is a powerful emotion"
 - avoid statements of fact as topic sentences: "Shakespeare wrote several sonnets dedicated to a 'dark lady.'"
- don't summarize the plot in your topic sentences
- don't introduce evidence in your topic sentences

Basic Principles of Transitions

- all the ideas in your essays should be logically connected
- your job as a writer is to show your readers that all of your ideas are connected
- you must use key words or phrases along with transitional words or phrases to make those connections clear and to make your ideas cohere
- you need transitions to connect paragraphs
- you need transitions to connect sentences within paragraphs

Transition DOs

- do use transitional words and phrases (see Casson p. 36) to connect your ideas
- do use key words or phrases to connect your ideas
- do read the topic sentences of all paragraphs in the essay to determine whether you can map the structure of your essay
- do read through every sentence within a paragraph to determine whether all the ideas are clearly connected
- do move from general to specific: argumentative topic sentence → introduction of central ideas and evidence to support the argument

Transition DON'Ts

- don't overuse transitional words or phrases (i.e., transitional phrases won't connect ideas that aren't logically connected)
- don't move from specific discussions of the topic to general discussions of the topic
- don't use the last sentence of the paragraph as a transition to the next paragraph

Principles of Using Evidence

- you must use evidence to prove your points
- all evidence must be introduced so that the reader understands its context (i.e., where it is from and what purpose it serves in the argument)
- all evidence must be integrated grammatically in a sentence
- evidence never speaks for itself: it must be analyzed if it is going to serve an argument

Evidence DOs

- do use evidence!
- do introduce evidence to give it a context in your argument
- do integrate evidence grammatically in your sentences
- do analyze evidence immediately after you have introduced it so that your reader understands how it serves an argument
- if you are citing a large passage, do follow it with a correspondingly large section of analysis in the same paragraph (at times, if the passage merits its, analysis may carry over to another paragraph)

Evidence DON'Ts

- ① don't use quotations where you don't need them (ie. no filler please!)
- ① don't start a paragraph with a quotation
- ① don't start a sentence with a quotation
- ① don't end a paragraph with a quotation
- ① don't forget to cite your sources