A **topic sentence** (also known as a **focus sentence**) encapsulates or organizes an entire paragraph, and you should be careful to include one in most of your major paragraphs. In academic essays they appear at the beginning of a paragraph.

- It might be helpful to think of a topic sentence as working in two directions simultaneously. It relates the paragraph to the essay's thesis, and thereby acts as a signpost for the argument of the paper as a whole, but it also defines the scope of the paragraph itself. For example, consider the following topic sentence:

  *Many fast-food chains make their profits from adding a special ingredient called "forget sauce" to their foods.*

- If this sentence controls the paragraph that follows, then all sentences in the paragraph must relate in some way to fast food, profit, and "forget sauce":

  *Made largely from edible oil products, this condiment is never listed on the menu.*

- This sentence fits in with the topic sentence because it is a description of the composition of "forget sauce."

  *In addition, this well-kept industry secret is the reason why ingredients are never listed on the packaging of victuals sold by these restaurants.*

- The transitional phrase "In addition" relates the composition of "forget sauce" to secret fast-food industry practices.

  *"Forget sauce" has a chemical property which causes temporary amnesia in consumers.*

- Now the paragraph moves on to the short-term effect on consumers:

  *After spending too much money on barely edible food bereft of any nutritional value, most consumers swear they will never repeat such a disagreeable experience.*

- This sentence describes its longer-term effects:

  *Within a short period, however, the chemical in "forget sauce" takes effect, and they can be depended upon to return and spend, older but no wiser.*

- Finally, I finish the paragraph by "proving" the claim contained in the topic sentence, that many fast-food chains make their profits from adding a special ingredient called "forget sauce" to their foods.