Topic Sentences & Transitions*

**Topic sentences** introduce a reader to the ideas each paragraph will explore and connect them back to the thesis.

**Transitional sentences**, which can come both at the beginning and end of paragraphs, justify the overall organization of your discussion and guide a reader from paragraph to paragraph.

### Examples

**Thesis:** Rita Dove’s “My Mother Enters the Workforce” is a poem that demonstrates how hard work pays off by showing the psychological, familial, and communal effects of social mobility.

**Transitional Sentences:**

- From the second line of the poem, we are exposed to the sensitivity of the speaker, whose dependence and anxiety, and whose love for her mother, color the poem.
- Family life in “My Mother Enters the Workforce” is shaped over time by the identification of the speaker with her mother’s struggle; the domestic rhythms of the household are governed by the workflow the mother and daughter share.
- We get a glimpse here of a **community** where businesses are expanding, seamstresses find work, and merchants get to sell blue shoes.

### Common Problems with Topic & Transitional Sentences

- Following the order of the poem you are analyzing, rather than the argument you are making.
- Beginning a paragraph with a signal phrase or quotation, rather than a justification of your next point.
- Not connecting back to the thesis.

*Adapted from Professor New’s video series “Beyond the 5-Paragraph Essay” and “The Harvard Guide to Using Sources,” a publication of the Harvard College Writing Program, 2020.*