HUMANITIES WRITING CENTRE

Postgraduate Writing
ACADEMIC WRITING STRUCTURE
Thesis statements

- This is a statement that expresses the main point of your paper in the form of an assertion.
- It is a sentence in which you state a claim (attitude/opinion) about your subject.
- It holds your paper together. Every paragraph of your paper should explain a part of your thesis.
- It states your true opinion about a subject that interests you.
- It is one that you will be able to support with evidence.
- Each essay must have only one thesis statement.
- It must be limited in scope to fit your knowledge and the space you have to develop the idea.
Thesis statements

• A thesis statement is a very specific statement -- should cover only what you want to discuss in your paper, and be supported with specific evidence.

• A thesis statement generally appears at the end of the first paragraph of an essay, so that readers will have a clear idea of what to expect.

• As you write and revise your paper, it is fine if you change your thesis statement.

• A good thesis has something worthwhile to say.

• A good thesis is clearly stated in specific terms.
Academic writing: Structure

• **Body:** elaborates on each of the key issues mentioned above in separate paragraphs.
  - Pay attention to overall coherence and transition between sections.
  - Takes its headings from topic.

- Note: a well constructed paragraph has *one* main idea that is supported by evidence.
Topic sentences

• Every paragraph should include a topic sentence that identifies the main idea of the paragraph.

• Generally the topic sentence appears at the beginning of the paragraph. It is often the paragraph’s very first sentence.

• A paragraph’s topic sentence must be general enough to express the paragraph’s overall subject. But it should be specific enough that the reader can understand the paragraph’s main subject and point.
Topic Sentences

When choosing a topic sentence, remember these guidelines:

1. The topic sentence should identify the main idea and point of the paragraph. To choose an appropriate topic sentence, read the paragraph and think about its main idea and point.

2. The supporting details in the paragraph (the sentences other than the topic sentence) will develop or explain the topic sentence.
Topic sentences

• Topic sentences reveal the main point of a paragraph. They show the relationship of each paragraph to the essay’s thesis, telling the reader what to expect in the paragraph that follows.

• Topic sentences also establish their relevance right away, making clear why the points they are making are important to the essay’s main idea.

• Topic sentences and signposts deliver structure and meaning to a reader.
The European marmot, like other species of marmot, is a social animal. It forms complex family groups each of which lives in a system of burrows in sub-alpine pastures. A typical family group consists of a male marmot, one or more females and a number of sub-adults and pups. Strong bonds develop between family members as the young pups receive support and protection from other members of the family but relations are not always harmonious. Fighting can break out particularly between sub-adults eager to establish their positions in the ranking.
Examples of paragraphs lacking topic sentences

Piranhas rarely feed on large animals; they eat smaller fish and aquatic plants. When confronted with humans, piranhas’ first instinct is to flee, not attack. Their fear of humans makes sense. Far more piranhas are eaten by people than people are eaten by piranhas. If the fish are well-fed, they won’t bite humans.