Thesis Statement and Topic Sentences

A THESIS is a sentence or group of sentences that explains the overall purpose of the essay. In essence, it says, “Here’s what the paper is about.” For example, “How I spent my summer vacation” would be the thesis for an essay about summer activities. A more complicated thesis would also indicate major points within an essay. The thesis, “How I spent my summer vacation in Italy, Spain, and England” forecasts three major components of the essay.

An essay that claims the policies of FDR helped America overcome the Great Depression of the 1930s might contain the following sentence:

“The policies of FDR helped America overcome the Great Depression of the 1930s.”

Simple enough, but the value of the thesis can be increased by adding what will become sections of the essay. An example would be:

“The policies of FDR helped America overcome the Great Depression of the 1930’s by increasing productivity, by getting unemployed persons back to work, and by satisfying more radical factions of society.”

The three items in the example are part of the thesis and will be the major points covered under the umbrella of the initial thesis.

TOPIC sentences of paragraphs perform a very similar function to the THESIS sentence. In the same way, a THESIS essentially says, “here’s what the essay is about.” Basically, a TOPIC sentence in a paragraph says, “here’s what this paragraph is about.”

Continuing with the example of FDR, a paragraph regarding one of the major points could be as simple as the following:

“Another helpful aspect of FDR’s policies was that these policies satisfied some of the more radical groups in American society that were calling for revolution.”

In this case, the TOPIC sentence begins the paragraph, and the writer would proceed by giving more details and information on the TOPIC in subsequent sentences.

TOGETHER, a well-constructed THESIS and clear TOPIC sentences within the paragraphs can stitch together an essay, provide a clear focus, and maintain a coherent “flow.”