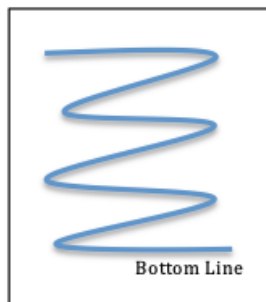# BLUF (The Topic Sentence Handout)

In business and academia, people have to read a lot. To manage this heavy reading load, most readers' top priority is getting through the text efficiently. To help your reader quickly grasp your main idea, just remember BLUF:

Bottom

Line

Up

Front
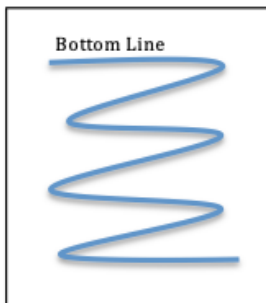
Consider this: When you write a document, you usually start at the logical beginning, and end with your bottom line: the main idea you need to convey.

This is because your goal as a writer is to think through an idea and quickly get it out onto the paper, before you forget it.

BUT your reader's goal is to quickly grasp your purpose, so you actually need to go back and flip that structure to put your bottom line up front.

You should be able to point to 1-2 sentences that contain the bottom line of your text, sometimes called a thesis statement.

Creating reader-friendly writing is the writer's responsibility!

This BLUF structure applies not only to documents, but also to paragraphs!

One specific concern for many homeowners is the presence of asbestos in their walls. This concern likely stems from the fact that asbestos is one of the most common fibrous minerals and has been definitively linked to cancer. Asbestos fibers can become trapped in the lungs of those exposed, and cause not only short term inflammation, but also long term health affects. This concern was mentioned by 35% of homeowners in 2016 after recent studies showed that millions of workers in the shipbuilding and demolition industry were exposed. While efforts…

In this paragraph, the writer has made a contract with the reader that the single main idea of the paragraph will be about homeowners' concern with asbestos.

In a paragraph, the first sentence is called a **topic sentence**. In the topic sentence, the reader expects to find the single main idea of your paragraph: the bottom line.

In fact, studies suggest that topic sentences prepare readers for the paragraph so well that they **improve readers' recall of the paragraph's content.**

Note: If need be, your topic sentence can be more than one sentence or appear slightly later in the paragraph.

BLUF Examples of Topic Sentences (bottom line bolded)

Example 1- Literature Review BLUF

Before: Hyland and Hyland note that students who receive positive feedback present more positive outlooks of their writing, while students who receive mostly criticism exhibit diminishing motivation. Larry Van Brimner conducted a study at a high school writing center and found that students who received praise or positive feedback on their writing said that the feedback made them want to work harder. Students who received negative feedback, on the other hand, felt angry with themselves for a lack of writing skills. **This shows that praise is more productive than negative feedback.**

After: **Research has shown that praise is more productive than negative feedback.** For example, Hyland and Hyland note that students who receive positive feedback present more positive outlooks of their writing, while students who receive mostly criticism exhibit diminishing motivation. Larry Van Brimner conducted a study at a high school writing center and found that students who received praise or positive feedback on their writing said that the feedback made them want to work harder. Students who received negative feedback, on the other hand, felt angry with themselves for a lack of writing skills.

Example 2 – Experimental Results BLUF

Before: Table 3 shows the results of correct filtration for both the filters tested. Each column illustrates the filtration rate for a different "type" of junk mail to prove consistency. For all three conditions, Filter A correctly filtered 88%. Filter B filtered 63%. It also appears that Filter A takes longer to run than Filter B, due to the type of programming language used in the former. (*explicit bottom line absent*)

After: **Table 3 shows that Spam Filter A correctly filtered more junk emails than filter B, suggesting that Spam Filter A is the more accurate filter.** Filter A correctly filtered 88% of junk emails whereas filter B only filtered 63% correctly. However, Filter A takes longer to run than Filter B, due to the type of programming language used in Filter A. This increased run time suggests that Filter B is superior if speed is the primary factor.

Example 3 – Argumentative Humanities BLUF

Before: Gandhi's wife, Kasturbai, and him did not get along for the first several months. Gandhi had sexist views developed from societal conventions that maintained the role of the woman was to serve the man. However, after much dysfunction in his home life, Gandhi was eventually able to open his mind to alternative possibilities about the equality of women. **He developed the then-innovative notion that women should be independent and self-reliant, which eventually became a big part of his philosophy.**

After: **A big part of Gandhi's philosophy was the then-innovative notion that women should be independent and self-reliant.** This idea was incited when Gandhi's wife, Kasturbai, and him did not get along for the first several months. Gandhi had sexist views developed from societal conventions that maintained the role of the woman was to serve the man. However, after much dysfunction in his home life, Gandhi was eventually able to open his mind to alternative possibilities about the equality of women.