CRAFTING EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENTS

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GOALS OF THE WORKSHOP

Understand the definition and function of argument-based thesis statements

Identify features of effective thesis statements

Learn two possible models or approaches for thesis statement development

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A thesis is a statement that articulates your central argument.

Features of an effective thesis statement:

• Specific and concise
• Suggests the essay’s direction, scope, and emphasis (Move 3a, 3b)
• Makes a claim that is arguable (i.e. not a statement of fact)
• Establishes the essay’s significance (Move 3d)
• Appears at the end of the introduction*
THREE APPROACHES FOR MAKING A DEBATABLE CLAIM

Making a claim of unstudied fact

- “Although scholars have done this, they have not done…”

Making a claim of value

- “Scholars have looked at X, but they have not considered Y. I will focus on Y because this area is not examined closely in the field.”

Making a claim for common ground

- Pointing out mutual points of agreement between what others have found and what you think—and then advancing your own point in the argument in order to find a solution to a problem that others (may) find acceptable.

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WHAT A CLAIM SHOULD NOT BE:

... self-evident. It should not be readily apparent.

... a statement of fact. It should offer an opportunity for disagreement.

... a statement of summary. It should be an interpretation of a subject rather than an overview of it.

... a claim should not be a statement of a plan. It should make insightful observations or point about the issues or plan proposed.
SHERIDAN BAKER’S THESIS MACHINE FOR BRAINSTORMING AN ARGUMENT

- **Topic**

- **Position (issue or problem)**
  - Add an “argument” to your topic

- **Reason(s) or Rationale**
  - Beginning with “Because” or “If,” include a reason-clause

- **Qualification(s)**
  - Beginning with “Although,” add a concession-clause

- **Reversing & Test**
  - Test your thesis by reversing your position & to come up with counterarguments
THESIS MACHINE EXAMPLE

**Topic:** The University of California’s proposal to use a new logo design.

**Position:** *these can vary* [Ask yourself questions that lead you to take a position on the topic: for/against in varying degrees]
- The new logo is a weird fit.
- The new logo looks fresh and updated.

**Rationale:** *these can vary* [Ask yourself *why*?]
- **Why** is the logo a weird fit?
- **Why** does the logo look fresh and updated?

**Qualification:** This is an acknowledgment of opposing or alternate views; The “although” clause of the thesis statement.
- What might be the motivation of the University? Could it have had goals that we could have agreed with (had we cared)? What are they?

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Q: Although its designers were probably motivated by the understandable goal of creating a universally legible image with global reach,

T: UC's proposed new logo

P: was a poor fit with the system's brand

R: because the design firm made little attempt to create any continuity with the system's traditional image, alienating core constituencies.

Although its designers were probably motivated by the understandable goal of creating a universally legible image with global reach, the UC's proposed new logo was a poor fit with the system's brand because the design firm made little attempt to create any continuity with the system's traditional image, alienating core constituencies.

Revised for style: The logo's designers were probably motivated by an understandable goal, such as creating a universally legible image with global reach. Nonetheless, the UC's proposed new logo was ultimately a poor fit with the system's brand because the design firm made little attempt to create any continuity with the system's traditional image, alienating core constituencies.
THE CSC METHOD

Stands for **CONTEXT, SUBJECT, CLAIM**

- **CONTEXT** – the area of discussion
- **SUBJECT** – the focus of the paper
- **CLAIM** – tells the reader what argument regarding the subject the paper will make

Ex. The most flagrant abuse of animal rights today ironically takes place in U.S. laboratories dedicated to the preservation of human life.

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Spotify could expand its market reach by focusing on establishing connections with unsigned artists, while also adapting to market trends and shifts in consumer demographics in the next few years.

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IDENTIFY CONTEXT, SUBJECT, AND CLAIM IN THE FOLLOWING THESIS STATEMENTS

1. For the music industry today, copyright laws should be set aside in favor of free Internet distribution.

2. Nintendo’s video game *James Bond* encourages the breakdown of family values.

3. Consulting is trying, dynamic and requires more than just logic; the ability to artfully perceive, eloquently present and empathically listen are necessary traits of a good consultant.
WHAT-HOW-WHY STRUCTURE

PARTS OF THE THESIS STATEMENT

- **WHAT** (specific argument you will make in this paper; your claim)
- **HOW** (the methods or tools/sources/pieces of evidence you will use to prove your argument; this is also the “map” of your essay)
- **WHY** (the significance of your argument to your overall topic; So What? of the essay)
To write your **WHAT**
- “In this essay, I will argue …”
  In this essay, I will argue that Spotify can expand its audience and market reach.

To write your **HOW**
- “I will argue this by/through…”
  I will argue this by using five-year trends in the industry, market projections for Spotify and similar brands/media, and a case study of Spotify’s competitor, Pandora.

To write your **WHY**
- “This is important/significant/relevant because…”
  This is relevant because changes in online streaming trends and market reflect transforming audience and consumer demographics that Spotify can take advantage of in the next few years.

**THESE SHOULD NEVER SURVIVE THE DRAFT STAGE!**

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Through careful analysis of five-year trends in the industry, market projections for Spotify and similar brands/media, and a case study of Spotify’s competitor, Pandora, Spotify has tremendous potential to expand its audience and market reach because changes in online streaming trends and markets reflect transforming audience and consumer demographics that Spotify can take advantage of in the next few years.

Because changes in online streaming trends and markets reflect transforming audience and consumer demographics that Spotify can take advantage of in the next few years, the company has tremendous potential to expand its audience and market reach as evidenced by the most recent trends in the industry, market projections for Spotify and similar brands/media, and the success of Spotify’s competitor, Pandora.

Although Spotify faces tough competition in the online music streaming industry, Spotify has tremendous potential to expand its audience and market reach as can be seen in recent industry trends, market projections and the success of its competitor, Pandora. By taking advantage of changing trends, markets, and consumer demographics, Spotify can grow in the next few years.
In this short paper, I would like to propose the need to contextualize the effect of anxiety. To say more especially, I argue that the effect of emotional responses perceived as anxiety are contingent of the other factors, certainty of threat from the stimuli on the one hand, and perceived competence of the people to deal with the threats on the other hand. In the next section I begin this article with the brief description of the discussion between the groups of the political psychologists advocating and criticizing the Affective Intelligence Theory by Marcus and his colleagues, and try to figure out how they reached to contradicting results. Their discussion offers the important starting point to develop the theory of the effect of emotion over information behavior further.

“Effect of Anxiety to Citizens: Does Anxiety Facilitate or Deteriorate Citizens’ Motivation and Capacity to Political Information and Activity?”

(Third-year graduate student in Political Science; NNS, L1: Japanese)
In this short paper, I would like to propose the need to contextualize the effect of anxiety. To say more especially, I argue that the effect of emotional responses perceived as anxiety are contingent of the other factors, certainty of threat from the stimuli on the one hand, and perceived competence of the people to deal with the threats on the other hand. In the next section I begin this article with the brief description of the discussion between the groups of the political psychologists advocating and criticizing the Affective Intelligence Theory by Marcus and his colleagues, and try to figure out how they reached to contradicting results. Their discussion offers the important starting point to develop the theory of the effect of emotion over information behavior further.

**WHY IS MISSING. Where could the writer add it?**
DRAFTING YOUR OWN THESIS STATEMENT

CSC Method

- CONTEXT – the area of discussion
- SUBJECT – the focus of the paper
- CLAIM – tells the reader what argument regarding the subject the paper will make

What-How-Why Structure

- WHAT (specific argument you will make in this paper; your claim)
- HOW (the methods or tools/sources/pieces of evidence you will use to prove your argument; this is also the “map” of your essay)
- WHY (the significance of your argument to your overall topic; So What? of the essay)

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EVALUATING THESIS STATEMENTS

Neither too broad nor too narrow

- **Too narrow:** The DC-3 in my opinion is the best plane developed during WWII.
- **Too broad:** The DC-3 played a role in American economy and aviation during WWII.
- **Just right:** The DC-3 hastened the end of WWII and boosted the economic growth of the United States during WWII.

Argumentative

- **Not argumentative (announcing the paper’s subject):** In this paper I will discuss the history of commercial aviation.
- **Not argumentative (statement of fact):** Commercial aviation was a prominent industry during WWII.
- **Argumentative:** Investing taxpayer’s money in commercial aviation during WWII was a misguided attempt to end the war.
EVALUATING THESIS STATEMENTS

Specific, not vague

- **Too vague:** Spotify’s brand can be improved.
- **Just right:** Spotify can improve its branding strategies by incorporating a more diverse market research.

Avoid weak phrasing

- “in my opinion,” “I believe,” “I think,” and “it seems to me”**
- **BUT** know the strength of your argument; do not overstate.

**Do you answer the question required for the assignment?**

**Some assignments might ask for your personal opinion and might be less formal than research papers, etc. Therefore, it may be appropriate to use “I” or “I think” in these assignments.**
INEFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENTS

The non-thesis thesis statement.
Does not take a position. It announces instead of argues a topic or position.

- Ineffective: “In his article, Fish shows that we do not have the right to free speech. This paper will consider the advantages and disadvantages of certain restrictions of free speech.”
- Better: “Fish’s argument that free speech exists more as a political prize than as a legal reality ignores the fact that even as a political prize, it still serves the social end of creating a general cultural atmosphere of tolerance that may ultimately promote free speech in our nation just as effectively as any binding law.”
- Even Better: “Even though there may be considerable advantages to restricting hate speech, the possibility of chilling open dialogue on crucial racial issues is too great and too high a price to pay.”
INEFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENTS

The overly broad thesis statement.

The thesis statement attempts to cover a lot of information and is unclear about the scope or limit of the paper.

- Ineffective: “The government has the right to limit free speech.”
- Better: “The government has the right to limit free speech in cases of overtly racist or sexist language because our failure to address such abuses would effectively suggest that our society condones such ignorant and hateful views.”
INEFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENTS

The incontestable thesis statement

The thesis is not arguable. The thesis statement is tautological or so universally accepted that there is no need to prove the point.

- Ineffective: “There are always alternatives to using racist language.”
- Better: “The ‘fighting words’ exception to free speech is not legitimate because it wrongly considers speech as an action.”
- Ineffective: “Although we have the right to say what we want, we should avoid hurting other people’s feelings.”
- Better: “If we can accept that emotional injuries can be just as painful as physical ones, we should limit speech that may hurt people’s feelings in ways similar to the way we limit speech that might directly lead to bodily harm.”


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Evaluating thesis statements

1. None of the arguments in favor of regulating hate speech are persuasive.

2. Among the many reasons we need to limit hate speech, the most compelling ones all refer to our history of discrimination and prejudice, and it is, ultimately, for the purpose of trying to repair our troubled racial society that we need hate speech legislation.

3. Hate speech can cause emotional pain and suffering in victims just as intensely as with physical battery.

4. Americans today are not prepared to give up on the concept of free speech.

5. The various arguments against the regulation of hate speech depend on the unspoken and unexamined assumption that emotional pain is either trivial or not real.
THEESIS STATEMENT FOR A REACTION PAPER

In a reaction paper, you might be asked to summarize/describe and analyze your personal observations, reactions, or reflections about an event, activity, or issue.

PROMPT: Write a 500-word reaction paper/response about your experience during the leadership activity. Make sure to cite course readings and concepts.

Brainstorm possible responses—as much as you can—that are relevant

- Is there a theme emerging to the possible answers you’re listing? If so, this could be your “WHAT.”
- Group similar ideas together and come up with a “category” to describe it

Brainstorm events or details that could support your theme (this is your HOW)

Make sure to state why why this theme is important to know/highlight (this is your WHY)
THESIS STATEMENT FOR A REACTION PAPER

PROMPT: Write a 500-word reaction paper/response about your experience during the leadership activity. Make sure to cite course readings and concepts.

“During the leadership activity, I was able to identify my leadership strengths as Coleman (2012) describes: empathy and self-awareness. Through the simulation and the hypothetical negotiation, I learned that my strengths could help form strong relationships with group members to facilitate better teamwork.”

“During the leadership activity, I was able to identify my leadership strengths as Coleman (2012) describes: empathy and self-awareness. Through the simulation and the hypothetical negotiation, I learned that my strengths could help form strong relationships with group members to facilitate better teamwork.”

**Context**: leadership activity; **Subject**: leadership strengths (empathy and self-awareness); **Claim**: these leadership strengths (empathy and self-awareness) could help me form strong relationships to have better teamwork.
Do I answer the question or address the problem?

Is it debatable?

- If your thesis simply states facts that no one could disagree with, it’s possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.

Is my thesis statement specific enough?

- If you use “empty” adjectives (i.e. good, successful etc.), make sure you illustrate them with details.
Does my thesis pass the "So what?" test?

- If a reader's first response is, "So what?" then you need to clarify or connect to a larger issue.

Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?

- If the body of your essay introduces new ideas not found in your thesis, you need to rewrite. Always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.

Does my thesis pass the "How-and-Why?" test?

- If a reader's first response is "how?" or "why?" your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader.
REFERENCES


https://www.english.upenn.edu/graduate/resources/teachweb/scthesis.html


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