Thesis Statements and Topic Sentences

A Note on Writing Purpose

Different types of writing have different purposes.

For example, Documentaries intend to inform viewers about a topic. Comedy intends to make viewers feel entertained and laugh.

The main purpose of an essay is to convince your reader of an idea. Because you want to convince them, it is important to make that idea clear right away.

This week, we're going to go over some ways you can accomplish this in your writing.

How to Argue Like a Lawyer

Because we're trying to convince our readers, it's a good idea to imagine yourself as a lawyer arguing a court case.

Things Lawyers Do:

- ★ Begin with an opening statement which tells the court what they plan to argue. (guilty or not guilty).
- ★ Use evidence throughout the case to prove their ideas.
- ★ Tell the jury how the evidence proves their points.
- ★ End with a closing statement which summarizes their overall points and tells the jury what to do now.

Things Essay writers do:

- ★ Begin with an opening statement which tells their readers what they plan to argue. (thesis statement).
- ★ Use evidence throughout the essay to prove their ideas
- ★ Tells the reader how the evidence proves their points.
- ★ End with a conclusion which summarizes their overall points and tells the reader what to do now.

Thesis Statements

A thesis statement is the sentence in your introduction paragraph which tells your reader what you plan to argue in your essay.

Thesis statements **cannot** be:

1. A question
2. A fact

This is because a question doesn't tell your reader what side you are on and a fact is not something that is arguable. It is just true.

There are lots of different kinds of thesis statements, but we're going to look at 5 types.

1. The "Should" thesis
2. The "Effect" thesis
3. The "Problem - Solution" thesis
4. The "People think this, but they're wrong because it's actually like this" thesis
5. The "Personal Lesson" thesis

The "Should" Thesis

Tells the reader your opinion about a topic

For example:

Marijuana should be decriminalized.

Schools should not have uniforms.

The “Effect” Thesis

Tells your reader that you think something has either a negative or positive effect on something else.

For Example:

> Video Games have a positive effect on teenagers’ emotional health.

The “Problem-Solution” Thesis

Tells your reader about a problem you are passionate about and offers some solutions to help reduce this problem.
(you could think of this one as a combination of the should and effect thesis).

For Example:

> Censoring literature is a problem because it has a negative effect on children’s learning and growth, so we should end censorship in elementary schools.

The "People think this, but they're wrong because it's actually like this" Thesis

Tells the reader that you're responding to a popular belief and you disagree.

For Example:

> People think that video games make children violent, but actually they can be a good outlet for their aggression.

The "Lesson" Thesis

Tells your reader an idea, lesson, or belief you have about an experience usually through story format or personal narrative.

One way to think about this kind of thesis is like this:
My experience with _____ helped me with _____
Or
My experience with _____ taught me _____

For Example:

> Growing up, I loved monster stories because they helped me cope with grief and abuse.

Take 10 minutes, and try writing possible thesis statements for your project using these 5 types that we've learned.

DON'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN: TOPIC SENTENCE, MAIN IDEA, AND THESIS STATEMENT
VIA 9GAG.COM
AND AT THIS POINT I'M TOO AFRAID TO ASK
MEMEFUL.COM

Topic sentences are connected to your thesis.

If your thesis argues that we “should” or “should not” do something then your topic sentences will tell us “why”

If your thesis tells us that something has a “negative or positive effect” on something, then your topic sentences will tell us “how”

For argumentative essays, a topic sentence should tell us “reasons why” or “ways how”

Practice checking your topic sentences by using “why” or “how” to connect them to your thesis. If they connect, you have a great topic sentence! If they don’t, try revising them until they do connect.

Checking your topic sentence:

Try using these transitions.

One reason that _____(repeat thesis)_____ is because _____.

One way that _____(repeat thesis)_____ is _____.

Because you're writing an argumentative essay, your topic sentences need to tell your reader reasons why your theory is true.

Each topic sentence should have a "topic" and a "claim" that connect to your overall argument.

For example:

Topic sentence: Uniforms prevent children from being able to express themselves.

Topic: uniforms

Claim: prevent children from being able to express themselves.

Independent writing (2 mins):
What thesis would this topic sentence help prove?

Match up Exercise:

Match each topic sentence to the correct thesis. Combine any topic sentences that are similar, and expand on any topic sentences that are incomplete.

Thesis: Schools should not have uniforms OR Schools should have uniforms.

- Uniforms prevent children from being able to express themselves.
- Uniforms help children stay focused on classwork and not on fashion.
- Uniforms are ugly.
- Uniforms can stop bullying.
- Uniforms have been around for hundreds of years.
- It is too expensive.
- They can keep kids safe.

Schools should not have uniforms

- Uniforms prevent children from being able to express themselves.
- Uniforms are ugly
- It is too expensive.

Schools should have uniforms

- Uniforms help children stay focused on classwork and not on fashion.
- Uniforms can stop bullying.
- They can keep kids safe.

Revising a topic sentence

Make sure it is specific.

Notice that “It is too expensive” doesn’t let your reader know what “it” is or how expensive. Similarly, “They can keep kids safe” doesn’t tell us how it keeps them safe.

Make sure your topic sentences are specific enough to stand on their own.

Make sure it is unique

Notice that “They can keep kids safe” and “They can stop bullying” could be combined IF you wanted that paragraph to focus on safety from bullying.

Make sure your topic sentences don’t repeat the same idea.

Make sure it has a claim.

Notice that “uniforms have been around for hundreds of years” doesn’t have an arguable claim. This is because it is a fact, and it is unclear whether it is arguing for or against uniforms.

Make sure your topic sentence is arguable and clearly connects to your overall thesis.

Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

Email me!
maureen.farrell-garcia@nyack.edu

CREDITS: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**