

Name: _____

Modern European History

Date: _____

Unit 2 – Reformations

Writing Thesis Statements, Outlines, and Introductions

The Role of the Thesis in Persuasive Writing

Persuasion is a skill you practice regularly in your daily life: you may persuade your siblings to help you clean the house, your parents to let you borrow the car, or your friend to watch your favorite movie. In your classes you are often tasked with making a persuasive case in writing – that is, you are asked to convince a reader of your point of view in an interesting, logical manner. Written persuasion follows a predictable pattern: after a brief introduction of your topic, you state your point of view on the topic with supporting evidence. The guiding point of the argument you will make in the rest of your essay is called the **thesis**.

A thesis statement:

- is a statement somewhere in your introduction (first paragraph) that takes a clear position on the subject to be discussed, presenting what you believe and why you believe it.

- contains three different sections:

 - identification of the topic

 - your opinion of the topic

 - the 3 main arguments you are making to support your opinion

- directly answers the question asked in a statement that someone could disagree with; it is an *interpretation* of a subject, not a statement of the subject itself.

- is a sophisticated statement; it does not make you think “Of course!” “So what?” or “Big deal?”

- is a road map for the essay; it states the arguments and examples or evidence you will use to prove your point.

- is not a personal statement (no first person – “I” or “I think”)

Thesis Statement – A direct statement that explains the topic of your essay, what you believe about that topic, and why you believe it.

How Do I Create A Thesis?

When creating your thesis, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my thesis actually address the question or writing prompt?

 - Re-reading the question after creating your thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.

- Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?

 - If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.

- Is my thesis statement broad enough?

 - Thesis statements that are too specific often do not have a strong argument because it is difficult to add supporting details.

Identifying a Strong Thesis

Read the thesis statement examples that follow. Determine whether each is a strong or weak thesis based on the information you just read. Then explain why it is a strong or weak thesis.

Thesis	Weak or Strong	Reason
Terrorism should not happen.		
Why should we recycle?		
Tom Brady is the best thing to happen to football in twenty years.		
There are many types of water in the world, such as rivers, lakes, and oceans.		
Robin Williams died in 2014.		
Racism is bad because it makes others feel put down, it sends a bad example to our children, and it adds hate to the world.		
The violence depicted on television and in video games has an effect on behavior.		
Parents should give children a weekly allowance because it teaches them responsibility, the value of a dollar, and respect for belongings.		

Thesis Example

Below is an example of the process followed to answer this question:

In your opinion, do high school sports have a positive influence on students?

Identification of Topic	Statement of Your Opinion	Arguments to Support Your Opinion
Sports offered in high school	They have a positive influence	<p>REASON #1: Teach social skills</p> <p>REASON #2: Teach time-management</p> <p>REASON #3: Provide exercise and teach benefits of hard work</p>
<p>Thesis: High school sports unquestionably have a positive influence on high school students because they teach social skills, reinforce time-management skills, provide exercise and show the benefits of hard work.</p>		

GUIDED PRACTICE

Read the following writing prompt and complete the tables that follow.

In your opinion, should the driving age be raised from 16 to 18?

Identification of Topic	Statement of Your Opinion	Arguments to Support Your Opinion REASON #1: REASON #2: REASON #3:
Thesis: 		

The Outline

The outline is a larger road map for the essay and requires you to identify your thesis in even greater detail. It breaks the thesis statement down into its major arguments and includes the basic supporting evidence for each of these arguments. Thorough essays have at least two pieces of specific evidence to fully and completely support each argument. This evidence needs to be specific, such as an event, piece of legislation, action, movement, etc.

Process Example

Suppose you are asked to answer the question “What is the best movie of all time?” Your basic thesis might be “*The best movie of all time is Forrest Gump*” but *why* is Forrest Gump the best movie of all time? Ask yourself this question to identify three supporting reasons to prove your thesis.

Identification of Topic the best movie of all time	Statement of Your Opinion <i>Forrest Gump</i> is the best movie of all time.	Supporting Arguments REASON #1: <i>Forrest Gump</i> contains important themes. REASON #2: <i>Forrest Gump</i> contains true-to-life events. REASON #3: <i>Forrest Gump</i> is a character that the viewer can truly love.
Thesis <i>Forrest Gump</i> is the best movie of all time because it contains important themes, true-to-life events, and a character that the viewer can truly love.		

Now, push your interpretation further – *What* important themes does *Forrest Gump* contain? *What* true-to-life events are included (and why is this important)? *In what ways* is *Forrest Gump* a character that the viewer can truly love (and, again, why is this important)?

Here's what the essay outline might look like:

- I. Basic Thesis:
"Forrest Gump is the best movie of all time because it contains important themes, true-to-life events, and a character that the viewer can truly love."
- II. *Forrest Gump* contains important themes.
 - A. good triumphs over bad
 - B. love conquers all
 - C.
- III. *Forrest Gump* contains true-to-life events.
 - A. Nathan Bedford Forrest/KKK
 - B. desegregation of the University of Alabama
- IV. *Forrest Gump* is a character that the viewer can truly love.
 - A. physically disabled boy succeeds in life
 - B. mentally disabled boy is in many ways more intelligent than others

The Introduction

The introductory paragraph contains the thesis and major arguments of the essay as well as additional lead-in information about the general subject matter that will thoroughly develop the thesis. The introduction is the first part of your essay that your audience will read, so it's important to make a good first impression. A weak introduction can cause readers to lose interest in your essay from the start, but a strong introduction will engage your readers and make them want to continue reading.

Keep in mind that your thesis statement is one of *many* possible answers to a question - there isn't one right answer; there are strong and weak thesis statements and strong and weak uses of evidence.

Writers often sit down to an empty computer screen and struggle to write an introduction, and understandably so: they do not yet know what exactly it is that they are introducing. You should have a thesis statement in mind as you write an essay, but there is no reason to have to write the introduction before you begin writing the body paragraphs. It is often much easier to write an introduction when you can actually see what you are introducing.

Introductions generally are not longer than the body paragraphs. Developing ideas in depth should occur in the body paragraphs of an essay, not in the introduction. The primary purpose of an introduction is to simply introduce your essay.

The introductory paragraph for the *Forrest Gump* essay might look like this:

"20th Century America was a difficult time and place for an individual to be disabled. Stereotypes and discrimination were abundant throughout the nation at this time, but were predominantly present in the deep southern state of Alabama. The movie Forrest Gump, set in just this type of environment, is truly the best movie of all time. Forrest, a physically and mentally disabled child born into this culture of racism and violence, proves that good can conquer evil and that love will in fact conquer all. This film entices the viewer's interest with many true-to-life events, such as the role of Nathan Bedford Forrest in the founding of the KKK and the controversial desegregation of the University of Alabama, while revealing that Forrest is in many ways more intelligent than the others around him. In the end, the viewer will fall in love with the main character, who, despite his physical and mental shortcomings, truly succeeds in life."