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Writing Boot Camp Unit
Thesis Statements

Abstract: This lesson will review the proper format of effective thesis statements. Students will review sample thesis statements, reflect on their own work and revise.

Procedure:

1. Before the class: The teacher should collect, and create a document of, about 36 student thesis statements from a recent paper.
2. Using the included materials, the class should begin with a review of the proper structure and purpose of a thesis statement. The teacher should divide the class into groups of four.
3. Each group should be assigned a grouping of about nine thesis statements.
4. Each group should decide which thesis statement(s) are the best in the grouping. Each group must come to a consensus on their selection(s).
5. Once the group has chosen they should write their selection(s) on the board.
6. Each group will explain their selection(s) to the class. They should discuss why they chose the thesis statement(s), what are the strengths and how could it be revised to make it more effective.
7. Once the class has discussed each group's selection(s), each student should reflect on their own thesis statement. The student should explain (in writing) what the strengths of their statement are and what aspects of their thesis can be revised. Finally, the students will revise their own thesis statement. This may be done for homework. If so, the student should come to the following class prepared to discuss.

The Thesis Statement: The Essential Starting Point

Creating a Framework

Readers of your papers will want you to do more than just randomly lay out information. Typically readers of college papers will expect you to make a point--that is, argue a thesis--by selecting material and using it in a logical order that both supports and clarifies your thinking about your topic. They will expect you to announce your main points in predictable places:

- At the end of your introduction (your thesis statement) and
- At the beginning of each paragraph or block of thought (your topic sentences).

The thesis statement and the topic sentences provide the framework for your paper.

For the writer, the thesis statement:

- Serves as a planning tool.
- Helps the writer determine the paper's real focus and clarify the relationship between ideas.
- Becomes a hook on which the writer can "hang" the sub-theses or the topic sentences that present evidence in support of the argument.
- Anticipates questions about the topic and provides the unifying thread between pieces of information.

For the reader, the thesis statement:

- Serves as a "map" to follow through the paper.
- Prepares the reader to read.
- Keeps the reader focused on the argument
- Helps the reader spot the main ideas.
- Engages the reader in the argument.
- Offers enough detail for your reader to grasp your argument.

Thus, a thesis statement:

- Makes an argumentative assertion about a topic; it states the conclusions that you have reached about your topic.
- Makes a promise to the reader about the scope, purpose, and direction of your paper.
- Is focused and specific enough to be "proven" within the boundaries of your paper.
- Is generally located near the end of the introduction; sometimes, in a long paper, the thesis will be expressed in several sentences or in an entire paragraph.
- Identifies the relationship between the pieces of evidence that you are using to support your argument.

Tips for Writing Your Thesis Statement

1. Determine what kind of paper you are writing:

- An **analytical** paper breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or idea, and presents this breakdown and evaluation to the audience.
- An **expository** (explanatory) paper explains something to the audience.
- An **argumentative** paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. The claim could be an opinion, a policy proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation. The goal of the argumentative paper is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided.

If you are writing a text which does not fall under these three categories (ex. a narrative), a thesis statement somewhere in the first paragraph could still be helpful to your reader.

2. Your thesis statement should be specific. It should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence.

3. The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of a paper.

4. Your topic may change as you write, so you may need to revise your thesis statement to reflect exactly what you have discussed in the paper.

Thesis Statement Examples

Example of an analytical thesis statement:

An analysis of the college admission process reveals two principle problems facing counselors: accepting students with high test scores or students with strong extracurricular backgrounds.

The paper that follows should:

- explain the analysis of the college admission process
- explain the two problems facing admissions counselors

Example of an expository (explanatory) thesis statement:

The life of the typical college student is characterized by time spent studying, attending class, and socializing with peers.

The paper that follows should:

- explain how students spend their time studying, attending class, and socializing with peers

Example of an argumentative thesis statement:

High school graduates should be required to take a year off to pursue community service projects before entering college in order to increase their maturity and global awareness.

The paper that follows should:

- present an argument and give evidence to support the claim that students should pursue community projects before entering college

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A few additional tips to consider:

- A thesis is not a title (“Fads of the 1980’s” or “Violence in Horror Movies”)
- A thesis is not an announcement of the subject (“I will be writing about ____ in this paper”)
- A thesis does not state absolute fact—it makes a judgment or interpretation (“China has the largest population in the world.”)
- Your thesis statement should be summed up at the beginning of your conclusion, but the wording may be varied from your original thesis

Diagnostic Essay Thesis Statements 2011

The following are your thesis statements from the diagnostic essay (in no particular order). Your group will be assigned a grouping of these thesis statements. Select the one or two that you feel are the STRONGEST ones, and write them on board. Your group should come to a consensus on your selection(s). Keep in mind that these were written by your peers, so do not be critical of those you feel are NOT strong; your comments could be hurtful to other students in the class.

1. But one thing is for certain; if other people see a person as an American, that person is functionally American—which is all that matters.
2. I think to be an American, you have to be strong, independent and patriotic.
3. America is a “melting pot,” a supposed blend of many different cultures and religions, but what makes someone uniquely American? The answer lies in their actions, behaviors, culture and way of life.
4. Being American, however, really does not depend on something or someone’s actions. All it really means is that something is from America.
5. America gets her uniqueness from people of different walks of life, without them we would be like any other un-diverse country.
6. Being American is following American culture, pride and behaviors.
7. For the people of the United States, they are referred to as Americans. Being an American means tht they have certain likes and dislikes, behavior, and way of living.
8. So the meaning of being an American is that you believe you are an American.
9. I don’t think being an American is anything special or different from being from any other country, but there are certain customs and behaviors that are American.
10. Over those years, however, massive changes have occurred. Not all of them are good.
11. While being American does mean countless opportunities within America, it often comes with ignorance.
12. I think that to be American, all you must do is live in America because here, there are many different cultures and religions that there is no specific one that separates Americans.
13. Americans are not perfect, and as a country, fit almost perfectly into the definition of two-faced. Americans should feel neither proud nor ashamed to be residents of the United States of America, but should, instead, feel satisfied and challenged to do more.
14. As an adolescent living in modern suburban Illinois, I believe that to be American, is more than just being a resident.
15. To be American means to be proud of living in American despite all the stereotypes, diverse cultural identities and separations.

16. Nevertheless, even if people have differing opinions, being American does require one essential component: living with respect and dignity.
17. A true American isn't someone just living in America but is someone who connects with the history and traditions of this country, embraces all of its people, and has a true understanding and belief in the theme that this country was founded on.
18. America was introduced to me as the land of freedom, and although a lot has changed in those fourteen years, I still believe that being American is living in America, not acting in a certain way.
19. Although there is no clear path to being American, there are elements that contribute to this concept such as speaking the native language, following the pop culture, and actually adapting to the American environment.
20. Being American is not simply a geographic designation, but more importantly a cultural one as well.
21. The two ways of telling how American someone is are by knowing how long that person has lived here, and by what similarities they have to the American culture.
22. Being American is an ideal compromise of having a culture that comes from your family's history, as well as being a part of all of the unique cultural aspects that come from American history and the large variety of people currently living here.
23. In order to be a legal citizen you either have to be born within the United States, or go through a long and grueling application process. But does that really make you American?
24. Being American means you are a free human being that does not have to act in a certain way or conform to someone else's values.
25. America is a country built on many false benefits.
26. To be viewed as American, one must live, or have lived, in the United States at one point, they have to appreciate the country that is providing them with life's necessities, and they should accept their responsibilities as residents of this country.
27. There are several features to Americans that make us unique and set us apart from the rest of the world.
28. It is being able to believe in what you want to believe and saying what you want to say that makes me proud to live in America.
29. To be American, one must understand and be engaged in the incredible country in which they live.
30. To be American, one must understand the culture, adapt to the culture, and feel a part of the culture.
31. A person is American if he or she has lived here long enough to allow his or her views on life to be affected by it, regardless of the magnitude.

32. Americans are Americans because they legally live in American or because they were born here.
33. To me, an American is either a resident of the United States or someone who grew up here.
34. Previous beliefs and cultures can still be practiced, yet in order to truly be what is now considered American one must also assimilate to many cultures present in this country
35. Probably the closest approximation of what it means to be an American is freedom of expression, being strong in your beliefs, and having great pride in the U.S.
36. To be an American is not simply determined by where you live, but by free will.

This Lesson addresses the following Common Core Standards:

W 9-10.1, .2, .4, .5
W 11-12.1, .2, .4, .5
SL 9-10.1, .3, .4
SL 11-12.1, .3, .4