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The Faculty of Foreign Languages

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COURSE PAPER

**Theme: The Development of Thesis Statement in Writing
Exposition**

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of most writing is to persuade an audience that your ideas are valid, or more valid than someone else's. Purpose, audience, tone, and diction are just a few elements a writer must consider. Selecting appropriate examples and expressing yourself clearly are also important if you want to appeal to your reader.

You should work to improve your writing by reading model essays and by writing your own. You may use current technology as a tool to hone your work. You explore and develop ways of approaching subjects deductively and inductively, establish a relationship between cause and effect, and support generalizations with analogy, anecdote, illustration, example, argument, and use of authority.

The aims and the purposes of the work. Main goal of the work is to learn how to construct a clearly reasoned, well-organized essay with an effective introduction, a sharply focused thesis statement, supporting paragraphs and an appropriate conclusion;

The scientific novelty of the work. The analysis of the thesis statement and its importance in writing expositions have been done in comparing the works by Ramage, John D. and John C. Bean

The practical value. The practical value of this work is that the material and the results of the given work can serve as the material at the theoretical courses of writing expositions and used for practical lessons in writing skills.

Literature overview. The methodical base on the work became the works of Russell, Tony, Allen Brizee, Elizabeth Angeli, and Russell Keck, materials from Internet, different handbooks, World Book Encyclopedia.

The structure of the work. The work consists of introduction, main body and conclusion, which are followed by the list of the literature used in the course of research.

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement is a specific sentence in an essay (but sometimes a cluster of sentences) that lets the reader know what the writer is asserting about the topic. All writing, no matter what form it takes, has a primary topic. In a college or high school situation, most professors agree that in a well-developed academic essay, this primary topic should be expressed in a thesis sentence. A thesis is a statement that:

- o Makes a claim that can be supported by a reason or reasons;
- o Unifies the paper by stating the writer's most important or significant point regarding the topic;
- o Is comprised of one sentence that does not diverge into many topics;
- o Forecasts the content of the essay;
- o Is placed most often in the beginning of the essay, usually within the first or second paragraph; and
- o Is sometimes implied rather than stated outright.

In this research paper, we'll focus on examining what a thesis is, how it works, and ways you can develop a strong thesis that unifies your work.

Thesis: Traits and Myths¹

Academic writing centers around an explicit or implied argument of some kind. We readers come to expect the writer to make a statement of his/her position on the subject at hand and to support that subject with data, details, analysis — evidence in short. The position the writer takes is his/her thesis. The evidence the writer uses will be the contents of the essay's body. Typically, the thesis will be near the beginning of the essay (but see below). A good thesis statement does possess certain characteristics that make it effective as the central, controlling idea governing all of the information in the body of the essay. Below are some examples. Note that the better examples share two traits: they

¹ "APA Citation Style Guide." *Landmark College Library*. Landmark College. n.d. Web. 19 Jun. 2012.

present specific argumentative points, not sweeping general statements, and they suggest that the writer will offer support later in the essay.

Additionally, a worthwhile thesis also exhibits the following characteristics:

1. It makes a clearly limited assertion that suggests the writer will expand the idea in further discussion. For example, compare the following.

too obvious, trite:

Shakespeare was the world's greatest poet.

better:

The emotive power of Shakespeare's 87th Sonnet comes from subtle linguistic manipulation of vocabulary and inflectional morphology.

2. The thesis points to the writer's central, controlling idea in the essay and indicates how the writer will develop the argument.

vague:

This essay will show that the campaign finance laws of the 1970s was a disaster for the American political system.

better:

By limiting the size of an individual's direct contribution to particular candidates and trying to insulate politicians from the corrupting influence of big money, the campaign finance reform laws of the 1970s have had the ironic and unintentional effect of making large donations even more important than ever.

3. A good thesis shows that the writer is aware of the disputes and disagreements surrounding the essay's subject.

sweeping generalization:

Criminalizing drug use just causes problems, as the history of Prohibition against alcohol demonstrates.

better:

Although several politicians and political commentators (such as William F. Buckley in "The War Against Drugs Is Lost") argue from a pragmatic position that current U.S. anti-drug policies are ineffective and too expensive (both fiscally and socially), I find that the most compelling case against current U.S. drug policies

exist in the history of the U.S. prohibition against alcohol in the early part of the 20th century.

Some Myths about Thesis Statements

- *Every paper requires a thesis (at the beginning).* Essays that are personal responses to a topic, or essays in which you explore a subject from a personal perspective should not begin with your already formed opinions. Similarly, essays of literary interpretation often expect us to describe many of the literary effects in the piece under analysis, rather than focusing only on one view of the text. In such essays, we should not prejudge the issues. Instead, the thesis (if we mean by that the central, controlling idea) comes at the end, as a conclusion we reach in the process of describing the subject.

- *The thesis must come at the end of the first paragraph.* This is a natural position for a thesis. Remember that the function of the thesis is to provide the intellectual "anchor" for the material to follow in the body of the essay. So, to position the thesis at the end of the first paragraph, a paragraph in which the writer introduces the subject and leads the reader to the main point, is a natural, logical, obvious position. Function determines form. However, it is not the only possible position. Some theses can be stated in the opening sentences of an essay; others need a paragraph or two of introduction; others can't be fully formulated until the end. See the point above, for example.

- *A thesis statement must be only one sentence in length.* Though it is true that we can often point to just one sentence as the thesis of a piece, we would be mistaken to think that all essays must always have just one sentence as the thesis. It is more important that the writer's thesis be clear and understandable. If that means that a writer needs two or even three sentences to capture his/her ideas, then intelligibility is far more important than rules like this one. A complex argument may require a whole paragraph of coherent exposition of an idea to make its initial statement clear. In a real way, that whole paragraph is functioning as the thesis in such cases. We humans have complex, multifaceted ideas, and so the language we

use to capture those ideas might easily be just as complex and multifaceted. That is the natural course of human language..

- *We can't start writing an essay until we have a thesis statement.* If writing is a process, a process in which I collect information, compose a draft, rewrite, and revise, then why shouldn't I also think of the thesis as a part of writing that will change, be revised, in the process of drafting, rewriting, and revising too? To begin with a tentative thesis statement (or hypothesis) is a valuable tool to help guide a writer's ideas, but changing and refining a thesis is a natural consequence of writing a paper. Furthermore, if we think of writing as a process, as a way in which we learn, then the thesis too is likely to change and adapt and grow as our knowledge of the subject changes, adapts, and grows.

- *A thesis statement must have three points of support.* This myth is a consequence of the practice of many writing teachers. Often, teachers ask for a "five paragraph theme." If the introduction and the conclusion are two paragraphs, then the body will be three paragraphs long, and the thesis will need three supporting points (with sufficient detail). OK. However, there is nothing magical about the five paragraph essay. It is only a form that is commonly required by teachers. The reality is that a thesis should have support, and the number of paragraphs required for that support is not fixed.

Before You Develop a Thesis

It's important to recognize that most writers do not have a clear thesis sentence as they begin their essay drafting. As you write, often you'll begin to see your own thoughts develop. You'll begin to understand your own ideas, points, and direction more clearly. If you are using research, your reading and experiences become new discoveries that may lead to changing your original direction. Or, after a peer critique or review by an instructor, you may find that more important or intriguing issues exist on which to focus your paper. Whatever the case, you should know that you might not have a clear thesis sentence until you have finished your first or second draft. Sometimes, this clearer thesis reveals itself at the very end of an early draft-look for it in your conclusion section.

If your "new" thesis suggests itself in an early draft, revise that draft with the new thesis in mind, making sure that all of your points in the essay support your clearer thesis. Often experienced writers will develop a "working thesis" as they write first and second drafts. Then, as the writing approaches its final stages, they develop a finalized thesis that accurately and clearly reflects their main points. Learning to be flexible about your paper's thesis is part of practicing a strong writing process.

The Major Components of a Thesis²

The thesis statement usually is not an announcement that begins, "This paper is about XYZ." In a polished essay, the thesis will make a claim about the topic. A claim asserts a position, point of view, or belief. So, let's suppose that you have to write a paper about the differences between college and high school. In this paper, the earliest version of your thesis might begin something like this: *College is very different from high school.*

Here you can see that this basic sentence makes a firm statement, or claim. There is no need to qualify the statement by saying, "This paper is about how college is very different from high school." Your reader will know that. While the statement "College is very different from high school" is a good start, it is not yet a fully developed thesis. Besides making a claim, a thesis must be supportable by a reason or reasons. So when you begin drafting your thesis, ask yourself: Why is college different from high school? What makes college different from high school? You can think of these types of questions as the "so what?" test. After looking at your early thesis, ask yourself "so what?" So what does this statement mean to me? So what does this mean to my readers? So what does this change or affect? If you can come up with a number of reasons here, you are well on your way to developing not only a thesis, but also an organizational structure for your essay. In your paper about the differences between college and high school, you might continue developing the thesis in this way:

²Hoyeol, Ryu. (2006). Rhetorical patterns in college students' English expository writings. *English Teaching*, 61(3), 273-292.

College is very different from high school, because it requires that students have and use more self-discipline than they did in high school.

Here, you can see that this thesis statement has integrated some reasons why college is different than high school. In writing this paper, you would follow through on your thesis by talking about how college students "have and use more self-discipline than they did in high school." This addition to the thesis sentence unifies the topic of the paper with what you, the writer, sees as its most significant point. This final sentence:

- o Makes a claim that can be supported by a reason or reasons;
- o Unifies the paper by stating the writer's most important or significant point regarding the topic; and
- o Is comprised of one sentence that does not diverge into many topics.

The true test of a good thesis is whether the paper and the thesis are making the same point. In this example, your paper should introduce and discuss several ways that high school did not require the degree of self-discipline that college does. You should use examples and supportive details to provide insight into both the high school and college situation.

The type of thesis you write and how you develop the paper that supports that thesis depend a lot on the audience (reader/s) and purpose (nature of the assignment or what you want to accomplish) for writing that essay. If you are writing an argumentative paper, you will write your thesis, called an assertion, differently than if you are writing an expository paper. Your thesis will change in shape, as well, when you are writing an exposition that explains "why" as opposed to one that explains "how."

Developing Your Thesis

To develop your thesis you should begin with a draft of your paper, or at least a basic outline. If you already have a draft, or even some brainstorming notes, look over them. Carefully read through what you have and look for where you are making a strong claim about your topic. Can you find one that is central to what

you want to say? Check especially in the second and final paragraphs since we often don't begin to really understand our own central ideas until we've already written quite a bit.

Exercise³

Part One

Open a word processing document, or get out a pen and piece of paper. Using a draft or outline of a paper you are working on, make a list of central claims that you make in the paper. Keep in mind that a claim is a statement that asserts a position, point of view, or belief.

Once you've completed your list, take a look at our response to this exercise. Our notes might look something like this:

-College is harder; classes are difficult; I have to make myself do my work; no mom to cook or clean for me; job is demanding and if I miss work, I'll lose it.
-High school teachers were really nice (and my college teachers seem scary); they would always give you more time or could be talked out of a firm due date; I knew my teachers, and didn't have to make an effort to meet them; I worked for my uncle and could take a few days off whenever I needed to.

Part Two

Now look through your paper or outline and identify the points that support your claim in short sentences. These may be examples, facts from research, parts of a process, or observations. Note these in your document on on your paper.

Again, once you've finished writing this out, take a moment and review the response that we've formulated.

Our response: College requires much more self-discipline than high school. For example, in high school, my mom did most of the cooking and cleaning, but now that I'm in college, I have to do it all myself. Another difference is that teachers in college are not a lenient as high school teachers. You can't cajole or con them. They expect quality work, and they expect it on time.]

³Hyland, K. (2003). *Second language writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Part Three

Return to your document; use the two lists you've created to write a thesis sentence that makes a claim, introduces your topic, and shows the significance you find in it or your point of view.

If you're having trouble coming up with a thesis, take a look at our model thesis: *College is very different from high school because one must learn more self-disciplined in order to get to class regularly and on time, to produce quality work, and to stay alert and fit.*

Once you've completed this exercise, you will have a working thesis that can guide you as you write. One valuable technique is to write your thesis on a separate sheet of paper or an index card and keep it in front of you as you draft and revise. Each time you move to a new paragraph or topic, look back at your working thesis and ask the following two questions. How does what you're writing relate to your thesis? Is what you're writing a logical extension or natural part of the thesis? Keeping these questions in mind can help you stay focused and avoid digression. Remember that as your work develops, your thesis may change. Don't be afraid to alter it to reflect new information or to encompass a new point of view. In your final review of your paper, identify your thesis and then see whether the rest of the work supports and explains it. One good way to check yourself is to write your thesis at the top of your paper and then list the topic of each paragraph in one or two words beneath that. If you can see a clear pattern of relationships between your thesis and each paragraph, you've probably done a good job of staying on task and following through with your thesis.

Once you've made sure the body of your paper follows through on your thesis, ask yourself or someone else if there's anything else that a reader needs to know about the topic in order to fully explain or support the thesis. If you find that there's something in your paper not directly related to your thesis, consider its value. Does this material need to be in the essay in order to clearly and fully explain your point of view? If you can take it out and the essay still maintains

its integrity (or focus), you probably don't need it. If you can't take it out, and it is not clearly implied by your thesis, don't be afraid to re-work your thesis.

Placing the thesis within the essay

In the majority of academic essays, the kind that you'll most often write for college, the thesis is explicitly stated and found early in the work. Many instructors look for the thesis in the first or second paragraph; some look more specifically for it at the end of the introductory paragraph/s. After a brief introduction, perhaps a narrative or general introduction to the topic, the writer usually makes a statement about the topic.

Sometimes, however, especially for more advanced writing or for writing such as creative non-fiction (of the type found in magazines such as *One Reader* or *Double Take* and in many college essay readers), the thesis is implicit, or implied. In this case, your teacher probably will teach you how to write the essay so that an explicit thesis statement isn't used but that the main idea is clear throughout the essay. Check with your instructor if you think that s/he may want such an implied thesis in your essay. Even with an implied thesis, however, you must be clear about your main claim and how you want to support it, making the information in this lesson especially useful for your writing.

Deciphering an Essay Assignment⁴

Essay Question

Argument: Smith claims that video games often reward players for simulating violence, and thus enhance the learning of violent behaviors. In order to lessen the violent behaviors exhibited by young people and adults alike, he believes that the government should ban the sale and use of such games. Present and evaluate his argument.

Step 1: Read the Assignment

⁴Vygotsky, L. (1996). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

The assignment can guide you as you organize your essay. Often, it contains important clues about the kind of essay you need to write. Read the assignment carefully: what is it asking you to do?

- Present
- Evaluate

Step 2: Generate Ideas for Prewriting

What information do we need in order to write this essay? What kind of criteria or evidence do we need in order to evaluate the argument?

Ask yourself: What do I know about the situation referred to in this argument? What is/are the argument/s being made? What are the stated premises? What are the unstated assumptions?

- Identify the Argument/s
- Brainstorm Premises/Assumptions
- Freewrite

Once you've gathered your ideas, it's time to formulate a thesis statement.

Formulating a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is a single, complete sentence that succinctly expresses your view concerning a particular topic. It will generally be included in the introductory paragraph of your essay, often serving as the final sentence of that paragraph. You must be sure that you support the statement in the body of the essay.

Three Main Questions to Ask About Your Thesis Statement

- ▶ Is your thesis statement debatable?
- ▶ Does your thesis statement have a proper scope (not too narrow and not too broad)?
- ▶ Does your thesis statement respond to the assignment?

Consider the following examples. Are these strong thesis statements?

1. The author advocates banning violent video games in order to mitigate violent behavior.
2. Smith's argument is false because I play video games and I am not violent.

3. Smith presents little evidence to support the argument.

Formulating a Thesis Statement, cont.

Response to the sample thesis statements

1. The author advocates banning violent video games in order to mitigate violent behavior.

This statement is not debatable, it is simply a re-statement of the author's position.

2. Smith's argument is false because I play video games and I am not violent.

This statement does not respond to the assignment. The statement also has improper scope: instead of evaluating the argument on its own terms, this statement inappropriately inserts unsubstantiated personal experience.

3. Smith presents little evidence to support the argument.

This statement is overly general.

Sample thesis statement

Smith's argument fails because he does not provide evidence of a causal link between violent video games and violent behavior.

Creating an Outline

Your thesis statement can help you to organize your essay. Now that you have a thesis, you can develop an outline for your essay. An outline organizes your ideas, and it makes writing your essay easier. A clear essay must be well-organized, and an outline helps you to think about the logic of your argument. It can also help you to show relationships among ideas in your writing, and it can define boundaries and groups of ideas.

How do I create an outline?⁵

There are many ways you can organize an essay. Remember, the writing assignment may give you clues about how to organize your essay. A well-

⁵Vygotsky, L. (1996). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

structured thesis, too, may help you to shape your outline. You might do any of the following:

- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas that you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange material in a logical order appropriate to your topic (e.g., introduction, exposition, evaluation, recommendation, conclusion).
- **Label:** Create main and sub headings.

Creating an outline will make organizing your thoughts a lot easier, either before or after you have written an initial draft of your essay. Even if you end up departing from the structure you create with the outline, making any kind of outline (even just jotting down some main ideas) will be beneficial to your writing process. Outlines, as well as thesis statements, can and should be revised as you write, as your ideas should become sharper and more refined throughout the writing process.

Sample Outline

I. Introduction:

Thesis: Smith's argument fails because he does not provide evidence of a causal link between violent video games and violent behavior.

II. Body:

A. Present the argument. Smith concludes that violent behavior will be reduced if the government bans violent video games. The argument is based on the premise that playing violent video games leads to violent behavior. It also assumes that the government is capable of sufficiently enforcing such a ban.

B. Evaluate the argument. The argument's conclusion and underlying premises are unsubstantiated. There is no evidence provided to support the underlying premise that behavior modification of video game players takes place in the experience of playing videos. Furthermore, video game players who receive symbolic rewards for simulating violence on screen do not necessarily receive rewards (material or symbolic) for violent behavior off screen.

C. Make a recommendation. Greater evidence is needed to develop a strong conclusion regarding the relationship between simulated violence and violent behavior.

III. Conclusion

Summary: Restate your thesis and key assertions using different words. Consider some of the implications of your paper.

How to Write a Thesis Statement for an Essay

The thesis statement of your essay is the single most important element of your paper. This is because the thesis statement is the one sentence that the entire paper will revolve around. As such, all subsequent paragraphs and sentences must serve to support the thesis statement you have developed.

The thesis statement serves many different purposes for the reader. First, it tells the reader how you will be interpreting the subject matter throughout the remainder. The thesis statement also serves as a sort of "road map" to the reader that helps the reader understand what he or she should expect from the rest. Similarly, when writing the report in response to an inquiry, it clearly states what your thoughts are about that question.

When writing a thesis statement, you need to try to keep it to just one sentence that will be included in your introductory paragraph. In this way, the rest of your paper can be written to organize the research you have gathered in a logical manner that supports the thesis you have written.

In order to come up with your thesis, you need to have a clear idea about what your paper will be about and what your position will be on the matter. If you are required to develop an opinion on the subject, this position should be conveyed in your thesis statement.

Before you develop your thesis statement, you will actually need to conduct an extensive amount of research on the topic first. This way, you can formulate your ideas and develop your position. Although you may have an idea of what your thesis will be as you conduct your research, which is referred to as having a

"working thesis," it will likely need to be tweaked and revised as you conduct your research further.

After developing your thesis statement, there are many inquiries you can ask yourself in order to determine if the thesis you have developed is a good one.

These include:

- Does the thesis answer the question?
- Does it take a position that could be challenged or opposed by someone else?
- Does it make a connection with the reader, or does it make the reader say "So what?"
- Can I write an article that supports the thesis I have developed?
- Does the report make the reader ask why or how?

A strong thesis will answer a question while taking a stand that may be argued against. In addition, it should connect with the reader in some way. If your thesis makes the reader say "So what?," you will need to rewrite the thesis statement. Similarly, there must be enough information available to adequately support your thesis. At the same time, if your thesis makes the reader ask how or why, it is probably too broad and should be narrowed accordingly.

If writing the report for a class, it is always a good idea to run your thesis statement past the instructor. This way, you can gain feedback and find out if the thesis statement is strong and appropriate for the assignment.

Expository Essay⁶

The purpose of an expository essay is to present, completely and fairly, other people's views or to report about an event or a situation. Expository writing, or exposition, presents a subject in detail, apart from criticism, argument, or development; i.e., the writer elucidates a subject by analyzing it. Such writing is discourse designed to convey information or explain what is difficult to

⁶www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/hutt/esl/dmtheory.htm

understand. Exposition usually proceeds by the orderly analysis of parts and the use of familiar illustrations or analogies.

Such an analysis requires

1. Reading with understanding the ideas developed in an article by clearly stating another's thesis, outlining the facts used by the author to support that thesis, and the "values" underlying the ideas

2. Putting what is read into a larger context by relating another's article or book to other work in the field

3. Clearly and effectively communicating this information to a defined audience. In other words, you must write clearly and fully enough for your readers to know how you have arrived at your analyses and conclusions. They should never have to guess what you mean; give your readers everything they need to know to follow your reasoning

This practice is not "just for students." Accurate analysis is a fundamental professional activity in almost all careers. Like any other fundamental skill, it must be constantly practiced in order to maintain and improve it. Other goals, such as learning "time management" and note-taking, are also developed by this activity.

Do not be afraid to revise your essay! In fact, you will probably want to change it at least once; this is called "thinking through a 'problem'" or "learning."

The revisions will consist of the following:

1. finding the precise words to express your thoughts
2. correcting typographical, spelling, and grammatical errors
3. making sure that your paragraphs are "tight" and sequenced properly
4. making sure that the transition ("segue") from one major topic to another makes sense

Expository essays also have a distinct format. The thesis statement must be defined and narrow enough to be supported within the essay.

- Each supporting paragraph must have a distinct controlling topic and all other sentences must factually relate directly to it. The transition words or phrases are important as they help the reader follow along and reinforce the logic.

- Finally, the conclusion paragraph should originally restate the thesis and the main supporting ideas. Finish with the statement that reinforces your position in a meaningful and memorable way.

- Never introduce new material in the conclusion.

Here are some popular essay topic examples for expository essay type:

- Explain Three Main Interpretations of Green Marketing
- Explain How Fashion Changes in 1920 Influenced Fashion Trends Today
- Explain Major Ecological Changes
- What is Love
- Explain the Consequences of Nationalism

Choosing the essay topic you are familiar with will help you to write a successful expository essay.

Conclusion

A strong thesis is one that makes a claim that can be supported by a reason, or reasons. In every essay, whether it is explicit or implied, the thesis sentence introduces the reader to the essay's main topic and the writer's point of view or approach to it. Usually, for good college writing, the thesis should be a clear, concise statement that guides the reader and that is placed early in the paper.

It is important to restate the thesis and the supporting ideas in an original and powerful way as this is the last chance the writer has to convince the reader of the validity of the information presented.

Sometimes, however, especially for more advanced writing or for writing such as creative non-fiction (of the type found in magazines such as *One Reader* or *Double Take* and in many college essay readers), the thesis is implicit, or implied. In this case, your teacher probably will teach you how to write the essay so that an explicit thesis statement isn't used but that the main idea is clear throughout the essay. Check with your instructor if you think that s/he may want such an implied thesis in your essay. Even with an implied thesis, however, you must be clear about your main claim and how you want to support it, making the information in this lesson especially useful for your writing.

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