

Thesis Statement Mini-Lesson

Lesson Objective

The purpose of this lesson is to provide students with a working definition of a thesis statement while also helping them acquire techniques that will aid them in constructing their own thesis statements.

List of Handouts

1. “Tips for Constructing a Thesis Statement”
2. “Identify the Problems in these Thesis Statements”

Length of Lesson

The lesson should take 20-30 minutes.

Variations for different disciplines

1. General mini-lesson

Source

1. Developer Unknown
2. Part of this mini-lesson is adapted from St. Cloud State University’s Literacy Education Online “Thesis Statement” material (<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/thesistatement.html>)
2. Revised by Jamie Aroosi, 11/03/2009

File name

ML_Thesis Statement_Gen.doc

Lesson Instructions

1. Discuss the characteristics of a good thesis statement (5 minutes). A sample script follows:

"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, and you must be sure that you can support the statement in the body of the essay.

To get a better understanding of what a thesis statement is, it helps to imagine it in the context of the paper writing process. During the research process, you will encounter a lot of information pertaining to your topic. The nature of this information will vary by discipline. For instance, it might be composed of data from a scientific experiment, it might be information from important texts within your discipline such as literary and cinematic works or philosophical treatises, or it might be composed of historical evidence. After you have uncovered this information (i.e., conducted the experiment, watched the film(s), read the book(s), spent time in the archives), **your thesis statement will almost always be a direct answer to this question: what does this information mean?** So, your thesis statement will be an interpretation or argument *explaining the significance of this information*, not a restatement of the actual information itself. Therefore, the main body of your essay will be your attempt to convince other people, by way of a more extended argument, that your interpretation of the information is correct. In this way, the information you initially uncovered will be transformed into evidence supporting your thesis."

2. Give students the first handout containing tips for constructing a thesis statement.

3. Work through good and bad thesis statements together with the students. (5-10 min.)

4. Give students the second handout containing problematic thesis statements in need of correction.

5. Have the students break into groups to correct the thesis statements. (5-10 min.)

6. Discuss the corrections as a class. (5 min.)

Tips for Constructing a Thesis Statement

- A thesis statement should not contain two conflicting ideas. If two ideas are in conflict, it is impossible to support them both.
- A thesis statement should never be so broad that it's difficult to discuss all of the relevant information.
- A thesis statement is an assertion that requires evidence and support, not a universally agreed-upon fact or an observation.

A universally agreed-upon fact or an observation: People use many lawn chemicals.

Thesis: People are poisoning the environment with chemicals merely to keep their lawns green.

- A thesis takes a stand rather than announcing a subject.

Announcement: The thesis of this paper is the difficulty of solving our environmental problems.

Thesis: Solving our environmental problems is more difficult than many environmentalists believe.

- A thesis is the main idea, *not* the title. It must be a complete sentence that expresses in some detail what claim you plan to support.

Title: Social Security and Old Age

Thesis: Continuing changes in the Social Security System make it almost impossible to plan intelligently for retirement.

- A thesis statement is narrow, rather than broad. If the thesis statement is sufficiently narrow, it can be fully supported.

Broad: The American steel industry has many problems.

Narrow: The primary problem of the American steel industry is the lack of funds to renovate outdated plants and equipment.

- A thesis statement is specific rather than vague or general.

Vague: Hemingway's war stories are very good.

Specific: Hemingway's stories helped create a new prose style by employing extensive dialogue, shorter sentences, and strong Anglo-Saxon words.

- A thesis statement has one main point rather than several main points. More than one point may be too difficult for the reader to understand and the writer to support.

More than one main point: Stephen Hawking's physical disability has not prevented him from becoming a world-renowned physicist, and his public appearances have brought important attention to neurodegenerative diseases while also bringing popular attention to the field of theoretical physics.

One main point: Stephen Hawking's status in the public eye has helped to revive a previously waning interest in theoretical physics.

Identify the Problems in these Thesis Statements:

1. The World's Fair in New Orleans was a disaster because of the way the press criticized the way it was run, but it was exciting for little children and had many good food booths.
2. TV commercials are obnoxious to the person who is intent on watching a good show; on the other hand, they provide entertainment in the antics of the performers and they provide a good opportunity to take a snack break.
3. Since politicians are constantly bombarding each other, how do they expect anyone to know who is right and who is wrong?
4. Unless people are conscious of pollution, the world will be destroyed by the year 2050.
5. Rap is both a creative and original form of music; it also has its roots in American jazz.

How could you turn each of the above sentences into an acceptable thesis statement?