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Lesson Proper for Week 13

As you draft your paper, your voice should flow smoothly and logically from one idea to the next. You should adopt an academic style that presents your position with precise, supporting details. Additionally, you should offer contradictory evidence, for this will give your report something to work against, thereby strengthening your argument.

Be practical

- Write what you know and feel, not what you think somebody wants to hear.
- Write portions of the paper when you are ready, not only when you arrive there by outline sequence.
- If necessary, leave blank spots on the page to remind you that more evidence is required.
- Skip entire sections if you are ready to develop later paragraphs.

Be uninhibited

- Initial drafts must be attempts to get words on the page rather than to create a polished document.
- Write without fear or delay.
- Be conscientious about references.
- Cite the names of the sources in your notes and text.
- Enclose quotations in your notes and text.
- Preserve the page numbers of the sources.



Focusing Your Argument

Your writing style in a research paper should be factual, but it should also reflect your take on the topic. Your draft will evolve more quickly if you focus on the central issue(s). Each paragraph then amplifies your primary claim. Your aim or purpose is the key to discovering an argument.

Do you want to persuade, inquire, or negotiate?

Persuasion means convincing the reader that your position is valid and, perhaps, asking the reader to take action. For example:

We need to establish green zones in every city of this country to control urban sprawl and to protect a segment of the natural habitat or the animals.

Inquiry is an exploratory approach to a problem in which you examine the issues without the insistence of persuasion. It is a truth-seeking adventure. For example:

Many suburban home dwellers complain that deer, raccoons, and other wild animals ravage their gardens, flowerbeds, and garbage cans; however, the animals were there first. Thus, we may need a task force to examine the rights of each side of this conflict.

Negotiation is a search for a solution. It means you attempt to resolve a conflict by inventing options or a mediated solution. For example:

Suburban neighbors need to find ways to embrace the wild animals that have been displaced rather than voice anger at the animals or the county government. Perhaps green zones and wilderness trails would solve some of the problems; however, such a solution would require serious negotiations with real estate developers who want to use every square foot of every development.

Often, the instructor's research assignment will tell you whether you want to persuade, inquire, or negotiate. But if it doesn't, try to determine early in the process where your research is heading.

Maintaining a Focus on Objective

Facts and Subjective Ideas

As an objective writer, you should examine the problem, make your claim in a thesis statement, and provide supporting evidence. As a subjective writer, you should argue with a touch of passion; you must believe in your position on the issues. For this reason, complete objectivity is unlikely in any research paper that puts forth an intellectual argument in the thesis statement. Of course, you must avoid being overly subjective, as by demanding, insisting, and quibbling. Moderation of your voice, even during argument, suggests control of the situation, both emotionally and intellectually.

Your objective and subjective analysis alerts the audience to your point of view in two ways:



Ethical appeal. If you project the image of one who knows and cares about the topic, the reader will recognize and respect your deep interest in the subject and your carefully crafted argument. The reader will also appreciate your attention to research conventions.

Logical appeal. For readers to believe in your position, you must provide sufficient evidence in the form of statistics, paraphrases, and direct quotations from authorities on the subject.

Refining the Thesis Statement

The thesis statement relates your convictions about the topic, advances your position, and limits the scope of the study. While you have worked with a preliminary thesis to direct your research, you must refine your proposition to clearly and exactly advance your viewpoint and invite the reader into the argument. The thesis statement performs three tasks:

1. It sets the argument to control and focus the entire paper.
2. It provides unity and a sense of direction.
3. It specifies to the reader the point of the research.

For example, one student started with the topic “exorbitant tuition.” He narrowed his work to “tuition fees put parents in debt.” Ultimately, he crafted this thesis:

The exorbitant tuition at America’s colleges is forcing out the poor and promoting an elitist class.

This statement, a conclusion he must defend, focuses the argument on the fees and their effects on enrollment. Without such focus, the student might have drifted into other areas, confusing himself and his readers.

RESEARCH TIP

Creating an Original Thesis

The thesis statement establishes an approach to the topic. At times the writer may assert a cause or provide an explanation while prompting a call for action. Regardless of the form it takes, a writer’s original thesis establishes the possibilities, probabilities, and interpretations that are subject to review in a rational presentation. To produce original research findings and avoid a plagiarized, borrowed idea from a source, the writer must narrow and isolate one issue by finding a critical focus, such as:

Thesis: Violence in children’s programming echoes an adolescent’s fascination with brutality.

This sentence advances an original idea that the writer can develop fully and defend with evidence. The writer has made a connection between the subject *television violence* and the focusing agent, *adolescent behavior*. The following thesis statements provide additional viewpoints:



Thesis: Television cartoons can affect a child's personality because they are so violent.

Thesis: Violence in children's programming echoes an adolescent's fascination with brutality.

These same issues apply also to the use of the enthymeme or the hypothesis.

Enthymeme: America's colleges are promoting an elitist class because exorbitant tuition forces out the poor and limits their access to higher education.

Hypothesis: This study will gather evidence on this proposition: Poor students are being locked out of higher education by the rapidly rising costs of tuition and registration fees.

Using Questions to Focus the Thesis

If you have trouble focusing on a thesis statement, ask yourself a few questions. One of the answers might serve as the thesis.

- What is the point of my research?

Thesis: A delicate balance of medicine, diet, and exercise can control diabetes mellitus to offer a comfortable lifestyle for millions.

Enthymeme: Because diabetes attacks the body in several ways, a person needs a careful balance of medicine, diet, and exercise.

Hypothesis: The objective of this study is to examine the effects of a balanced program of medication, diet, and exercise for a victim of diabetes.

- What do I want this paper to do?

Thesis: The public needs to understand that advertisers who use blatant sexual images have little regard for moral scruples and ordinary decency.

- Can I tell the reader anything new or different?

Thesis: The evidence indicates clearly that most well water in the county is unsafe for drinking.

- Do I have a solution to the problem?

Thesis: Public support for safe houses will provide a haven for children who are abused by their parents.

- Do I have a new slant and new approach to the issue?

Thesis: Personal economics is a force to be reckoned with, so poverty, not greed, forces many youngsters into a life of crime.

- Should I take the minority view of this matter?

Thesis: Give credit where it is due: Custer may have lost the battle at Little Bighorn, but Crazy Horse and his men, with inspiration from Sitting Bull, *won* the battle.



- What exactly is my theory about this subject?

Thesis: Because they have certain medicinal powers, functional foods can become an economic weapon in the battle against rising health care costs.

- Will an enthymeme serve my purpose by making a claim in a *because* clause?

Enthymeme: Sufficient organ and tissue donation, enough to satisfy the demand, remains almost impossible because negative myths and religious concerns dominate the minds of many people.

- Will a hypothesis serve my purposes?

Hypothesis: An education program to dispel negative myths and religious concerns will build a greater base of organ and tissue donors.

- What are the keywords surrounding this issue that I might use in framing the thesis statement?

Hypothesis: The objective is examination of issues with regard to supply and demand, the political power struggles that are emerging, and the ethical and perhaps even moral implication engulfing the world's scattered supply of fresh water.

Adjust or Change Your Thesis

During Research if Necessary

Be willing to abandon your preliminary thesis if research leads you to new and different issues. For example, one writer began research on child abuse with this preliminary thesis: "A need for a cure to child abuse faces society each day." Investigation, however, narrowed her focus: "Parents who abuse their children should be treated as victims, not criminals." The writer moved, in effect, to a specific position from which to argue that social organizations should serve abusing parents in addition to helping abused children.

CHECKLIST

Writing the Final Thesis

You should be able to answer "yes" to each question that follows.

Does the thesis:

1. Express your position in a full, declarative statement that is not a question, not a statement of purpose, and not merely a topic?
2. Limit the subject to a narrow focus that grows out of research?
3. Establish an investigative, inventive edge to the discovery, interpretation, or theoretical presentation?
4. Point forward to the conclusion?
5. Conform to the title and the evidence you have gathered?



Writing an Academic Title

A clearly expressed title, like a good thesis statement, will control your writing and keep you on course. Although writing a final title may not be feasible until the paper is written, the preliminary title can provide specific words of identification to keep you on track. For example, one writer began with this title: "Diabetes." Then, to make it more specific, the writer added another word: "Diabetes Management." As research developed and she realized the role of medicine, diet, and exercise for victims, she refined the title even more: "Diabetes Management: A Delicate Balance of Medicine, Diet, and Exercise." Thereby, she and her readers had a clear idea of what the paper was to do—that is, explore methods for managing diabetes. Note that long titles are standard in scholarly writing. Consider the following strategies for writing your title.

1. Name a general subject, followed by a colon and a phrase that focuses or shows your slant on the subject.

Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation: Myths, Ethical Issues, and Lives Saved

The World's Water Supply: The Ethics of Distribution

2. Name a general subject and narrow it with a prepositional phrase.

Gothic Madness in Three Southern Writers

3. Name a general subject and cite a specific work that illuminates the topic.

Analysis of Verbal Irony in swift's *A Modest Proposal*

4. Name a general subject and follow it by a colon and a phrase that describes the type of study.

Black Dialect in Maya Angelou's Poetry: A Language Study

5. Name a general subject and follow it by a colon and a question.

AIDS: Where Did It Come From?

6. Establish a specific comparison.

Religious Imagery in N. Scott Momaday's *The Names* and Heronimus Storm's *Seven Arrows*

As you develop a title, be sure to avoid fancy literary titles that fail to label issues under discussion.

Poor: "Foods, Fads, and Fat"


Better: "Nutritional Foods: A Survey"

Best: "Nutritional Foods: A Powerful Step on the Path of Preventive Medicine"



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