ENGL 102-A02

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**Thesis Statements**

* **What is a thesis statement?**

A thesis statement:

* tells the reader **how** you will interpret the **significance** of the subject matter under discussion.
* is a **road map** for the paper; in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.
* directly answers the question asked of you. A thesis statement is an **interpretation** of a question or subject, not the subject itself.
* makes a **claim** that others might dispute.
* is usually a single sentence or two somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your **argument** to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.
* **How to develop a tentative thesis:**

1. *Turn your question into a position.*
   * A thesis statement should do more than merely announce a topic. It must reveal what position you will take in relation to that topic, how you plan to analyze/evaluate the subject or the issue.
2. *Narrow your thesis.*
   * Your thesis statement should be as clear and as specific as possible. Shape your topic so you can get straight to the “meat” of it. Remember, you cannot include everything in your paper. You need to make a choice and commit to it.
3. *Adapt your thesis.* 
   * Your thesis will be in a working stage until the end of your paper writing process. You will continue to refine your thesis as you revise your argument(s), so your thesis will evolve and gain definition as you obtain a better sense of where your argument is taking you. Your thesis statement is not set in stone until you print your final essay!

* **Testing a thesis:**
* ***Do I answer the question?*** Re-reading the question prompt after constructing a working 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, it is possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument. A weak thesis restates the question without providing any additional information. In other words, your thesis must respond to the topic in more than a “yes” or “no” response.
* ***Is my thesis statement specific enough?***Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like “good” or “successful,” see if you could be more specific: *why* is something “good”; *what, specifically,* makes something “successful”?
* ***Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?*** If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. It’s okay to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary. Revisions can turn B papers into A papers!
* ***Does my thesis pass the “so what?” test?*** The best thesis statements tell their reader why their argument matters.If a reader’s first response is, “So what?” then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or connect to a larger issue. Remember: avoid generalizations and grand claims, such as “Since the dawn of time…” or “War is bad.”

**Works Cited:**

Bullock, Richard and Weinberg, Francine, Eds. *The Little Seagull Handbook.* W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.

Centre for Writing Studies. “Writing Tips: Thesis Statements.” University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne, 2013.

The Writing Center. “Thesis Statements.” University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014.