

PSYCH 1140 - Thesis statement

Thursday, 27 January 2022

The need for a thesis

Typically, the goal of writing an academic paper is to either:

- Explain something (explanatory)
- Provide an evaluation of an issue/ topic (analytical)
- To argue about an issue (argumentative)

In all of these writing types, there usually is a point/ argument/ claim to be made and good writing would support the main claim with evidence and explanation about its significance.

Main components of good (academic) writing:

- Claim: the main point of your arguments (e.g. hypothesis about a particular phenomena or counter argument to a known theory/ notion).
- Evidence: support for your claim. Typically, scientific papers will draw on either research findings or previous literature.
- Significance: why your claim matters or the "so what?" question. This is the part of your paper that tells the reader why you're making your argument and why people should read it.

A thesis statement provides the road map for the argument you're going to make in your paper. In 1-2 sentences, the thesis statement should provide the reader with your claim, the evidence that will support this claim and the significance of the claim. The thesis statement typically appears at the end of the first paragraph of the paper.

Components of a good thesis statement

A good thesis statement should:

- Answer the question/ prompt of the writing assignment.
- Clearly articulate the writer's claim/ argument.
- Direct readers to the evidence of the claim.
- Be specific.
- Answer the "so what?" question.

Is a thesis statement set in stone?

No! In fact, the best thesis statement should continue to evolve and get refined throughout the writing process.

Let's look at an example

Question: How does environmental stability and change influence attention to the external world?

Thesis statement	Stability within the environment helps allocate attention strategically over time.
Does the thesis statement:	
Answer the question?	
Have a clear argument?	

Specific enough?	
Have clear evidence?	
Have clear significance?	

Is this a good thesis statement?

How about this statement:

The brain seems to exploit the stability within everyday experience, allocating attention specifically to periods when the environment changes, thus allowing the mind to wander at other times. This event processing mechanism is crucial considering the limits of our cognitive capacity to sustain attention over time.

Your turn!

Break into groups and consider the paper: [Schachter, D., L., Addis, D., R., & Buckner, R., L. \(2007\). Remembering the past to imagine the future: the prospective brain. Nature Reviews: Neuroscience, 8, 657-661.](#) Find their thesis statement and discuss in your groups whether their statement is a good one.

Use these exercise sheets to facilitate your discussion:

[Group exercise sheet](#)

Digging deeper into the paper

Thesis statement:

What do you understand by 'episodic memory'?

What are the pieces of evidence that support the claim? Discuss this in groups.

[Group exercise sheet](#)