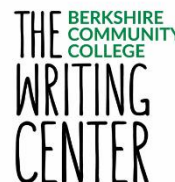


What is a Thesis?

Tips for Making & Supporting a Sustained Argument



KEY TERMS & ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

THESIS: Clear, interesting, and arguable. A thesis is a claim, demand, evaluation, understanding, and/or position with which someone else can – and does – disagree.

Note: a thesis should not be *only* a matter of personal preference or taste. A thesis engages with larger social, political, or academic conversations already taking place.

EVIDENCE: Credibly sourced and established facts, statistics, and direct quotes. In other words, evidence is the stuff that everyone agrees is true or that happened. Make sure to evaluate your sources and corroborate references.

Furthermore, if you are interpreting a novel, film, play, poem, or any other work of art, the material of the art (the language, scenes, stage directions, colors, etc.) serves as the “evidence.” We might all read the same book (evidence), but have different interpretations of its significance or quality (thesis).

LOGIC: Reasoning, analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and perspective. Your logic is how you explain your understanding of the evidence. For instance, I think (claim) because (logic) . Your logic & reasoning will connect your evidence to your thesis; it will illustrate your thought process for your reader.

ANTICIPATING OBJECTIONS & LIMITING YOUR CLAIMS: Because any thesis is a claim, you will bolster your credibility and engage with complexity by respectively acknowledging and reflecting on different points of view. You might also look to establish common ground and shared values for nuance.

OPEN-ENDED VS. YES/NO QUESTIONS: One way to develop the primary argument that your essay will make is to play around with how you frame the question the thesis will answer. For instance: How should I vote on Proposition 1? (Y/N) vs What’s at stake with Proposition 1 on the ballot? (open-ended).

WHERE TO START? Often, it’s difficult to begin your process with a thesis. Instead, narrow your focus to ask a question in response to a specific problem. That question will guide your research & the answer – or even the question itself – will likely evolve.

CONTEXT / PROBLEM / IMPLICATIONS: Make sure to establish the context, define the problem, and articulate & explore unforeseen consequences and/or implications to illustrate what’s at stake & for whom.