Thesis Statements

Any college-level paper requires the use of a thesis statement to focus the research one is trying to do. Below is a brief introduction to thesis statements and some “tricks of the trade” to help you out as you begin your research.

What is a Thesis Statement?

A good thesis statement is:
- Clear and concise
- Assertive and confident

A good thesis:
- Takes a stand
- Answers the research question
- Addresses an audience
- Demonstrates a clear purpose for the rest of the paper
- Reflects your viewpoint without using “I”
- Answers the “So what?” question adequately

Thesis Theory

- Think of the thesis as joining intellectual dialogue.
  “A good thesis is arguable - it is one take on a topic and could be refuted in dialogue.
- A thesis statement is geared towards “reasonable people” - it doesn’t make rash generalizations or form hasty conclusions.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Could a reasonable person draw different conclusions from my data/examples?
- Am I making assumptions?
- Who is my audience?
- What is my purpose for this paper? Does my research reflect this purpose? (Note: the thesis states the purpose of the paper)
- What is my evidence? Does my thesis accurately encompass all my data?
- Am I being dogmatic (i.e. am I making assumptions)?
- Is my thesis too obvious? (usually an indicator that the thesis is not narrow enough)
- Does it require the length prescribed to answer?
- So what?

Tricks of the trade

- Try cause/effect. Use words like although, while, because of, etc...
- Make an arguable value judgment (Argument A is better than Argument B because...)
- Avoid vague or generalization
  - Avoid words like all, ever, always, never, interesting
  - Use words like most, many, usually, seldom
• Formulate your thesis around a center as you research. In other words, as you research continually narrow down to a specific focus.
  - Ex: Architecture → Domes → Roman domes vs. Byzantine domes
• Avoid listing (My paper argues this aspect by points A, B, and C). Instead, form an argument that is supported by points A, B and C. (see Example #2 below)
• When tempted to use first person (“I” or “we”), either use the plural (e.g. “people think that...“) or if forced, use “one” (i.e. “one thinks that...”)
• Talk to your professor!

Examples

1. Much maligned and the subject of unwarranted fears, most bats are harmless and highly beneficial.
   - Stand: Bats are harmless and actually beneficial.
   - Purpose of paper: To explain how bats are harmless and beneficial.
   - So what?: Bats have traditionally been subjects of undeserved fear.

2. By granting college students liberal lending arrangements, credit card companies often hook them on a cycle of spending that can ultimately lead to financial ruin.
   - Stand: Credit card companies are at fault for high student debt.
   - Purpose of paper: To demonstrate how credit card companies trap unsuspecting students with liberal lending arrangements.
   - So what?: Students are unaware of this particular situation, and thus should be informed so as to avoid financial ruin.

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