

Slide 1:

Welcome back! In today's lecture we will continue to talk about the writing process. You'll learn not only what a thesis statement is but also how to tell the difference between a strong thesis statement and weak thesis statement. Then, you'll learn how to support your thesis statement with strong and solid evidence. I'll also introduce the importance of your introduction, your conclusion, and your title. We've got a lot to cover, so let's get started!

Slide 2:

Last week we spoke about the necessity of prewriting and you experimented with some prewriting techniques. I hope that went well and that you found a technique or two that felt right for you. If you didn't, keep trying. Your writing muscles might just be tired from not being used. A little warming up and stretching is likely all you need to get in practice. Before we conclude our discussion on prewriting, let me say that you should never attempt to skip prewriting altogether. When students say to me, "I don't need to prewrite", I look at them skeptically. Everyone needs to prewrite, myself included, and I'm a writing teacher! So prewrite! And experiment! Don't deprive yourself of the chance to make your writing life easier—and your grade higher!

Slide 3:

Once your prewriting is done, look it over and decide what the point of your essay will be. If you study your prewriting until you're exhausted and still aren't sure what your point is, that's an indication that you need to do more prewriting, or try a different prewriting technique.

Once you can see what it is you'll be writing about, you'll need to take that idea and put it into a solid well-written sentence. Let's pause here to consider an example: consider what your life would be like if you were less distracted. I think this is a fantastic topic. Let's think about it together. I'll use myself as an example, but I encourage you to think about your life in the same way.

After prewriting, I came up with the idea that I spend too much time surfing the Internet, sitting in traffic, and chatting with friends. I don't enjoy the traffic, but surfing the Internet after a long day at work relaxes me, and I always love the opportunity to catch up with friends. However, I want to accomplish more in my life. I often feel like I wish I didn't have to sleep so that I could accomplish all that I want. To become more productive, I'm going to have to make sacrifices and restructure my schedule. My prewriting revealed that I want to spend more time practicing yoga, working on my creative writing, listening to music, and traveling. Now, let's take these facts and create a thesis!

After some thinking, I come up with this thesis: In order to make more time in my life for activities I enjoy, I must devise a plan to waste less time, especially time spent surfing the Internet, sitting in traffic, and chatting with friends.

If I were to actually write a paper on this topic, I now have something to work with. Then, as I generate support, which is what we'll talk about next, for every piece of evidence that I come up with I can ask myself: "does this support my thesis?" Anything I come up with that does not support my thesis has no place in my paper.

Slide 4:

A good thesis statement doesn't only tell the reader what the topic of the essay is. It also presents the writer's attitude, opinion, idea or point about the topic. For example, in the thesis I generated about

making time for things I enjoy in my life, I didn't just say, "I need to make time for activities I enjoy in my life." I could write about this, certainly. But instead I said, "I need to make time for things I enjoy in my life, so I must devise a plan to waste less time." I even went as far as to include the areas in which I tend to waste time. Do you see the difference? I didn't only tell the reader what I need to do but also how I might go about accomplishing my goal.

Let's consider a few more thesis statements and look at the difference between a strong thesis statement and a weak thesis statement.

Say your topic was tobacco. A weak thesis statement might be: "Tobacco is hazardous to your health."

A strong thesis on the same topic might be, "Tobacco is hazardous to your health because of its devastating effects on the human body, and its high rate of addiction."

OK, one more.

Assume the topic is affirmative action. Here's a weak thesis statement: "Affirmative action should be reinstated in schools across the United States."

Now, a better one: "Affirmative action should be reinstated in schools across the United States to ensure student bodies have diverse populations, and that minority groups who were repressed by the U.S. government in the past have a chance at building a solid educational foundation."

For the good thesis statements, evidence will be easy to generate. We can find instances of the effects of tobacco that we can use to argue that tobacco is hazardous to the human body. We can also find information about affirmative action that will support our claim that we should reinstate affirmative action in the United States.

Slide 5:

The trick to a good essay, and thesis statement, is to choose a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow. If your teacher told you to write a paper about sleep, for example, that's a general subject. There are so many directions you could go in. You might write about how easy or difficult it is to fall asleep, about sleeping in, waking up early, sleeping too little, sleeping too much. These topics are slightly more specific. In choosing one, you would limit what about sleep your paper would address. Those are examples of limited subjects. It is from a limited subject that we can create a thesis statement. Let's try one.

From the general subject "sleep" I create the limited subject "sleeping enough." Take a few moments to try to create a thesis statement that would zoom in even closer. What might you write about the topic of sleeping enough?

Here's what I came up with: "In order to sleep enough, I need to manage my time efficiently."

Let's try another.

If your general topic was television, and your limited subject was "music on television," try to come up with a thesis.

Here's what I came up with: "Watching music videos distracts me. I prefer to listen to music without any visual stimulation."

Don't get frustrated if you can't come up with thesis statements immediately. That rarely happens, and when it does, it can probably be attributed to good luck.

Slide 6:

The creation of a thesis statement takes a lot of work. It can be frustrating that after all that work, you'll only have a sentence or two of actual writing to show for it. But trust me, a good thesis statement lays the foundation for a good paper. A strong thesis statement is not only a must-have. It will also make the entire rest of your paper much easier to write!

Let's go over a few tactics that will help you when it comes time to write your thesis statements.

Write statements, not announcements. What's the difference, you might be wondering? Well, there's absolutely no need to tell your reader what your paper is about by saying something like "this paper is about..." or "such and such will be the focus of my paper." Think about it. If you're writing a paper about a certain subject, that subject will be obvious. Give your reader some credit. They'll be able to figure out what your paper is about!

Avoid statements that are too broad. Going back to our original example, a thesis statement that says: "global warming is problematic" is much too broad. Think of all the evidence that could support that thesis. You'd have to write thousands of pages to fully back up that statement! Your topic must be manageable. "Global warming is wreaking havoc on coastal communities" is a much better thesis statement, because it isn't as broad.

You must also avoid statements that are too narrow. Take a look at this example, "We had an intense storm last year." This is true and specific but what will you be presenting? You might give the exact location of the storm and summarize the damage it caused, but what else would there be to say? There's simply not enough here to write an entire paper about.

One more point on thesis statements. Your thesis must develop one idea and one idea only. If you ask your reader to focus on two different points, you're setting yourself up for an organizational nightmare. Here's an example of a thesis statement that tries to introduce more than one topic. "Studying with others has several benefits, but it also has drawbacks and can be difficult to schedule." With this thesis statement, you'd have to write a paper that showed both the pros and the cons of studying with others. Don't give yourself such a daunting task! Instead focus on one idea and stick with it. "Studying with others has some serious drawbacks" would be a suitable thesis. So would "Studying with others has many benefits."

In summary, a thesis must be broad enough to require support in an essay. But it must also not be too broad. Finally, a thesis must present one point only.

The more you practice recognizing narrow, broad, and thesis statements with too many ideas in them, the stronger your own thesis statements will be!

Slide 7:

Now we're ready to talk about support! Every thesis of every essay must be backed up by specific reasons and details. I recommend creating an outline as a way to determine if you have enough support to back up your thesis. A sample outline is provided for you under Course Home. Forcing yourself to see

how you'll lay things out and what fits in where will help you determine when you're ready to write the bulk of your essay. It will also make the act of writing that much easier—because you'll know just where everything goes.

Specific details are essential to any paper. They get and hold your readers' interest. Vague generalities don't capture your reader's interest or allow them to share in your experience. So when it comes to providing details keep two things in mind: you'll need good details and you'll need enough details!

Slide 8:

Let's consider a quick example of what a specific detail looks like.

I could say "I ate lunch" but this has no specific examples.

Or I could say "I had miso soup and teriyaki tofu for lunch, followed by a black coconut iced tea." This, sentence, on the other hand, gives specific details to support the sentence "I ate lunch." See the difference?

Slide 9:

Next let's discuss organization. There are two common ways to organize an essay. The first method is chronological, also known as time order. The second is emphatic order, which presents details in order of importance, saving the most interesting or important detail for last.

When we write chronologically, we detail how things happened in the order they happened. If I were to write an essay organized chronologically about my day so far, the details would go something like this: After many instances of pressing the snooze button, I begrudgingly got out of bed. Then I took a shower. My cats reminded me that they were hungry while I picked out my clothes. After getting dressed, I fed my cats. Then I made my lunch. Next, I started the car and drove to work. At work, I made instant oatmeal and ate it. Finally, I sat down and got started on the day's tasks. Granted, this would be an extremely boring essay but as you can see, I moved through the details chronologically. I described everything in the order in which I did things. If you write an essay this way, you'll probably want to use words such as "first," "next," and "then," just the way that I did. These words let your reader move through time with you.

In contrast, when we write details in emphatic order, we present our information in the order of importance. Let's look at the example of my day again, but this time I'll organize the details emphatically. "I'm getting hungry already and I only had my breakfast a few hours ago. I'm glad I remembered to bring my lunch today! I'm also glad I remembered to bring a change of clothes for after work, since I'm going out. It sure wasn't easy getting out of bed this morning after the long day I had yesterday and the long day ahead of me again today."

As you can see, although this is still an incredibly boring essay, the details are no longer organized in chronological order. You still learn many of the same details, but not in the same order. Note that you also learn about my difficulty getting out of bed last, even though it happened first. The reason I saved this for last is because it's most important. Learning that I have a long day ahead of me puts my difficulty getting out of bed this morning into context.

Experiment with both methods of organization. And know that the more appropriate method will depend on what you're writing.

Slide 10:

We just spoke a bit about moving through time on paper by either the chronological method of organization or the emphatic method of organization. Let's talk about some common transitional words, and how they come in handy. When we see a word such as "finally" we know that the writer is reaching the end of what he or she is trying to say about a topic. The writer doesn't need to say "I'm getting near the end of my argument." "Finally" is a single word that clues us in. "Therefore," "In conclusion," "Last of all", and "In summary" are some other words that indicate a writer's point is coming to a close.

What would you think if you heard the word "However" or "On the contrary"? If you thought that was code talk for a writer trying to make a counter point, or offering a piece of evidence that differs from an earlier point, you're absolutely correct. Transition words help keep your reader on track!

Slide 11:

Transition words aren't the only way to emphasize points in your writing. Using pronouns and synonyms and repeating key words are other ways to stress your point. Let's chat about how to do so.

Repeating words is tricky. We've been told not to repeat ourselves in writing, right? To some extent this is true. We don't want to make the same point over and over again. But sometimes it's to our advantage to repeat just a few key words. Repeating an important word or phrase will remind your reader of what your central idea is.

Pronouns are another tool for connecting ideas. We can also use pronouns in order to avoid unnecessarily repeating ourselves. Let's look at this example.

My cats, Louie, Jim, and Raina, were hungry this morning. Louie, Jim, and Raina are hungry every morning. Louie, Jim, and Raina really do eat a lot!

That sounds horrible, doesn't it?! Now watch as I use pronouns to get the same idea across.

My cats, Louie, Jim, and Raina, were hungry this morning. They are hungry every morning. My cats really do eat a lot!

By using "they" and "my cats" I'm able to get rid of the clunky repetition of "Louie, Jim, and Raina" that exists in the first example. By using pronouns, my reader is able to assume—and assume correctly—that I'm talking about my cats the whole time without having to name them incessantly. Now that you'll never forget the names of my cats, I hope you'll also remember how effective pronouns can be! Just a word of caution though, don't rely on pronouns too much! They can get repetitive too!

Slide 12:

Synonyms are words that are alike in meaning. Using synonyms is another way to prevent needless repetition. They also serve to create variety in your writing.

Let's try to generate a few synonyms together. How many words can you think of that mean the same thing as cold?

Here's my list: cold, chilly, freezing, icy, frozen, frigid. Did you come up with any others?

Use variety in your writing. Build a solid vocabulary and then flaunt it! And don't forget, a thesaurus can become your good friend when it comes to synonyms!

Slide 13:

You're doing great! We've spoken about so many important elements that go into the crafting of a strong essay. You learned how to create a thesis statement, how to generate support, how to reinforce your point with transition words and how to avoid repetition through the use of pronouns and synonyms. This is all extremely valuable information so please review it, consult your textbook, and ask your instructor for any clarification you might need.

There are a few more things I want to talk about before we conclude today's lecture. Good essays have thesis statements, solid support, and are presented well. But they also have strong introductions, conclusions, and titles. Let's chat about these things.

Slide 14:

Introductory paragraphs must be well-written so they can attract the reader's interest enough to encourage him or her to keep reading. They must also supply any background information a reader might need to make sense of the essay. Introductions must also present a thesis statement so a reader knows what he or she will be reading about. Often, introductions signal to readers what the topic's plan of development will look like. This is a lot of information to occur right up front, isn't it? I like to think of an introduction as a contract to the reader. You must get them to sign the contract to keep reading the rest of your work. How do you do this? By creating an interesting introduction.

There are many ways to create an introduction. You can explain the importance of your topic to your reader. Or maybe you'll want to relay a brief incident from your life or the life of someone else that demonstrates your essay's topic. You might choose to ask questions or use a quotation. How you begin your paper depends both on your writing style as well as the topic of your paper.

Slide 15:

Your textbook also provides handy tips for the creation of conclusions. Just the way you might begin your paper with a quote or a thought-provoking question, sometimes these are really satisfying ways to end your essay as well. You might also consider ending with a prediction or recommendation for your reader. The rule of thumb is to leave them wanting more. A reader should walk away from your paper thinking "hmmm....isn't that interesting." Simply summarizing everything you said feels cheap. It works sometimes, but sometimes it falls short. So experiment! And definitely check out your reading assignment for some powerful examples of successful conclusions!

Slide 16:

Creating a title is a great chance to get creative. As a writer, I find that titles sometimes come to me easily and other times they don't. Sometimes that perfect word or phrase just doesn't come naturally. Other times, I think of a good title before I even do any writing! You're likely to experience a similar mix of frustration and good luck. Just go with the flow.

I recommend generating something called a working title. You can think of this as a "title in progress." What does this mean exactly? Basically, I recommend that you create a title for your work in the early stages of development. You can always change it if you come up with something better down the road, but having a title, even a temporary one, will help keep you on target. A title stares you in the face, reminding you of your topic.

Let's consider an example. Remember our hypothetical paper on global warming? Let's assume that we finished our prewriting and have an idea of what we want to include. But the paper itself isn't written. Our working title might be "Global Warming and Coastal Communities." It's not bad, but it's not fantastic either. It could be more interesting. Maybe, by the time we get to putting the final touches on our paper, that title evolves to "How we Can Stop the Havoc: Coastal Communities Suffer in the Wake of Global Warming." Better, right?

A quick word of logistics before we conclude. When you put your title on your paper, it shouldn't be underlined or in all capital letters. Don't use quotes or italics either. Simply center your title on the first line of your page and capitalize the first letter of important words. Then skip one line and begin your essay.

Slide 17:

Oh I think that's enough for today, what do you say? We've really covered a lot of ground! Do yourself a favor and review your lecture closely. You'll also want to visit this week's weblink.