Topics Included:

- Organic approach to thesis writing (pg. 1)
- Thesis as a plan and/or promise (pg. 1)
- Breaking down a thesis into steps and/or parts: topic, position/claim, qualification, and support; how to identify these steps in sample sentences (pgs. 2-4)
- Discussion of the three types of claims: factual, value, and policy (pgs. 4-5)
- Contrasting thesis examples with explanations for what makes them weaker or stronger (pgs. 5-8)
- Understanding and using qualifications in a thesis statement (pg. 7)
- Using the graphic organizer method to help create a thesis (pgs. 7-8)
- Using a thesis checklist (pg. 9)

What is a thesis statement, and why is it important?

A thesis statement can be one sentence or a whole paragraph that presents the central argument(s) of your paper to the audience.

- One way to think of a thesis is that it is a plan for your paper, one that will serve as a guide for you and your readers.
- A more strict way to think of your thesis statement is that it is a promise made by you, the writer, to your audience.

Learning how to develop a strong thesis statement is important for several reasons:

- It creates a base structure for argumentative and/or persuasive writing and lets your audience know where your argument is going.
- Writing that requires a thesis statement varies from statements of purpose to project proposals, making it an important skill for many different professions and fields.
What are the main parts of a thesis?

1. **The topic**: is what the writer is writing about. For example, the topic in a statement of purpose for an application is simply whatever you are applying for. In an argumentative essay the topic is whatever will be argued about.

2. **The position, opinion, or claim**: is where the writer takes a position on the topic. This portion of the thesis need not be an argument for or against the topic, but may be an opinion or claim that can be proved with sufficient evidence. For example, in a cover letter the claim is that the author is the best candidate for a position.

   - **Example**: I would be an ideal candidate for the real estate management position at the Bluth Company because X, Y, and Z.

3. **The subordinate clause (optional)**: is a phrase or statement of an opposing argument used in order to set up the writer’s counter-argument. Popular subordinate clauses include: despite, in spite of, although, even though, though, etc. For example, if arguing an imminent zombie apocalypse, the author would begin with one of the opposing viewpoints.

   - **Example**: Although there have been no widely proven cases regarding the reanimation of the deceased, X, Y, and Z.

4. **The support**: is a claim or claims containing evidence the writer will use to prove their position. This is the X, Y, and Z of the thesis, but keep in mind you don’t necessarily need three supporting claims.

   - **Example (with subordinate clause)**: Although there have been no widely proven cases regarding the reanimation of the deceased, private companies are pouring money into scientific research regarding stem cells, nanotechnology, and biologically enhanced super-foods that will inevitably lead to a zombie outbreak.

   - **Example (without subordinate clause)**: A zombie outbreak is inevitable because private companies are pouring money into stem cell research, nanotechnology, and biologically enhanced super-foods, which all have the potential to turn humans into zombies.

Identifying the different parts of a thesis:

After reviewing the different parts of a typical thesis statement, take time to identify each of these parts in a few example sentences.

Despite the fact that my midi-chlorian count is only slightly higher than average, I am the apprentice you are looking for because I am able to maintain inner-peace during stressful and/or maddening experiences, I have had extensive training with a lightsaber, and I can move large boulder-sized objects using the force, making me an ideal candidate for the Jedi Academy.
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1. Find the topic: ______________________________________________________________________

2. Find the position, opinion, or claim: ______________________________________________________________________

3. Find the subordinate clause (if present): ______________________________________________________________________

4. Find the support: ______________________________________________________________________

In the 1920s and 1930s, immigrant and American-Filipina women challenged gender roles and expectations, forged their own women’s networks as well as community institutions, and were essential to the economic survival of the Filipina/o American family. (Dawn Mabalon, “Writing Angeles Monrayo into the Pages of Pinay History”, UH Press, 2003)

1. Find the topic: ______________________________________________________________________

2. Find the position, opinion, or claim: ______________________________________________________________________

3. Find the subordinate clause (if present): ______________________________________________________________________

4. Find the support: ______________________________________________________________________

The bacterium Helicobacter pylori colonizes the gastric mucosa of approximately half the world’s population. Although all infected individuals develop gastric inflammation, only a small fraction (<1%) develop gastric adenocarcinoma, which accounts for 10% of total cancer-related mortality worldwide. (Nuri Kodaman (et. al), “Human and Helicobacter pylori coevolution shapes the risk of gastric disease”, PNAS, 2014)

1. Find the topic: ______________________________________________________________________

2. Find the position, opinion, or claim: ______________________________________________________________________

3. Find the subordinate clause (if present): ______________________________________________________________________

4. Find the support: ______________________________________________________________________

Whereas Brennan addresses the novel’s role in embodying and imagining the nation, incorporating different subcultures into one community, I contend that Díaz uses the novelistic genre to embody the structure and linguistic diversity of the Dominican American diaspora, rather
than the nation. Employing the appealing guise of polyvocality, *Oscar Wao* charms and entices the reader, especially the academic reader, into becoming complicit with the heteronormative rationale used to police male diasporic identity. (Elena Machado Saéz, “Dictating Desire, Dictating Diaspora: Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as Foundational Romance”, UW Press, 2011)

1. Find the topic (this one is harder to find):

2. Find the position, opinion, or claim:

3. Find the subordinate clause (if present):

4. Find the support:

### Three basic types of claims for thesis statements:

It is important to understand the different types of claims that can be made in order to tailor them to a specific audience, context, and topic in which the writer feels confident she or he can explain. Using a claim in the thesis statement is vital because it establishes the author’s position early, but most likely several other types of claims will arise in a paper.

1. **Factual claims**: usually presents objective information based on scientific data or history. In addition, factual claims can be relational or causal. Finally, factual claims are often predictive as they attempt to comment on the future based on existing data, facts, and/or history.

   - **Example**: Prison inmates who graduated from the Prison University Program (PUP) in the 2007-8 fiscal year experienced a recidivism rate 15.8 percent lower than the matched comparison group who had no involvement with PUP. (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, “2012 Outcome Evaluation Report”, Office of Research, October 2012)

2. **Value claims**: are evaluations of taste and/or moral judgments.

   - **Example**: The death penalty is morally wrong and hypocritical because it involves taking another’s life, which is exactly what we are punishing the defendant for doing.

3. **Policy claims**: are statements of action and usually also involve factual and value claims. For example, a city employee might write a plan suggesting a change in policy that includes the advantages of that plan.

   - **Example**: The California State Prison, Los Angeles County should adopt a program similar to the Prison University Program (PUP) at San Quentin State Prison because inmates who
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graduated from the PUP in the 2007-8 fiscal year experienced a recidivism rate 15.8 percent lower than the those who had no involvement with PUP. (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, “2012 Outcome Evaluation Report”, Office of Research, October 2012)

The difference between a strong thesis and a weak thesis:

A thesis can be judged strong or weak for various reasons, and even a thesis statement that contains the most important parts (topic, position/claim, subordinate clause, and support) can be weak if it is too broad and/or not arguable.

Example of a broad thesis statement: Rehabilitation is beneficial for prisoners.
This sentence is too broad for several reasons:

- The term “rehabilitation” has various connotations. What does it mean to rehabilitate someone? Is the author talking about treating a drug problem? Is the author discussing therapy and/or education for criminal behavior? The author must ask himself or herself what kind of rehabilitation they mean.

- In what way is rehabilitation beneficial for prisoners? Does it help them get a job after prison? Does it help them learn important social skills? Does it help them deal with anger? The author must ask how rehabilitation is beneficial for prisoners.

- The author must ask what kind/type of prisoners are being rehabilitated? Would rehabilitating violent criminals be the same for prisoners who committed non-violent offenses?

Example of a narrower thesis statement: Education is a form of rehabilitation that is beneficial for non-violent prisoners because it gives them the critical thinking and communication skills necessary to become productive members of their community.

In this example, the type of rehabilitation has been narrowed down by:

- Specifying the type of rehabilitation: educational rehabilitation
- Specifying the type of prisoners who will be rehabilitated: non-violent
- Specifying how/why rehabilitation is beneficial: it gives non-violent inmates critical and communication skills
Example of a non-arguable thesis statement: Smoking is bad for your health.

- This thesis statement is not arguable for one main reason: it has been widely proven that smoking is bad for your health. Currently the debate about smoking centers on how much it affects the smoker’s and others’ bodies. It is nearly impossible to argue that smoking is good for our health using credible sources.

Example of an arguable thesis statement: The U.S. government should increase the tax on cigarettes.

This thesis statement is arguable because:

- Someone may disagree that the government should tax the consumers more on a product just because it can be detrimental to their health.

- A person might argue that increased taxes impede their right to smoke.

- Also, others might think that instead of taxing the consumer, the government could be finding a way to disrupt the wealthy tobacco companies.

Example of a narrow and arguable thesis statement: In order to decrease smoking rates, the U.S. government should increase the tax on cigarettes for consumers.

This example is narrow because:

- It specifies who is doing the taxing and to whom it is being done.

- The reason for taxing cigarettes is specific: to decrease smoking rates.

The example is arguable because:

- Someone can disagree with different aspects of the statement, such as whether the government should be involved or not.

Example of a narrow and arguable thesis statement: The U.S. government’s tobacco control program should focus on educating people about the risks of smoking because it would affect most citizens and it would engender an environment of free choice.

This example is narrow because:

- It details the focus of the government’s control program

- It tells the reader why that focus is the best choice.

This thesis statement is arguable because:
One may disagree with the focus of the government’s tobacco control program.

One other important way this thesis statement narrows its focus is by using the qualifier “most”. Qualifications such as, “generally”, “typically”, “usually”, “most”, etc., narrow the focus by admitting that there will be some exceptions to the argument.

**Using a graphic organizer to create a thesis statement:**

The graphic organizer is a more visual method that can be used to create thesis statements.

**Example thesis statement with graphic organizer:**

Although it would be at the taxpayers’ expense, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) (subordinate clause) (topic) should provide a discount program to students because it would encourage education (position/opinion/claim) (1st support) for low-income individuals, provide them affordable transportation, and decrease the (2nd support) number of student drivers on the freeways. (3rd support)

**Subordinate Clause (opposing viewpoint):** Although it would cost the taxpayer’s money,

**Topic:** The BART is too expensive for students.

**Position/Opinion/Claim:** The BART should provide a discount for student commuters.

**Support/Evidence:**
1. Encourages education for low-income individuals
2. Provides students affordable transportation
3. Decreases the number of student drivers

**Thesis Statement:** Although it would be at the taxpayers’ expense, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) should provide a discount program to students because it would encourage education for low-income individuals, provide them affordable transportation, and decrease the number of student drivers on the freeways.
Now, use this blank graphic organizer for a thesis statement you are currently working on.
Using a thesis statement checklist:

- Does it focus on one topic?
- Does it take a position, state an opinion, or make a claim?
- Does it address the significance of topic i.e. why it matters?
- Can the topic be supported by evidence?
- Is there something you are trying to argue or prove?
- Is it narrow and specific?
- Does it take into account opposing viewpoints or use a subordinate clause?
- Does it create an outline or layout a plan for what will be discussed further?

Remember, writing a thesis statement is a process, meaning that a thesis may change over the course of different drafts, or as the paper takes shape. Try to allow space and time for your thesis statement to fully develop.

Now, take time to re-write your thesis statement using the lessons in this handout to revise your thesis statement from the graphic organizer:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________


