

Developing Thesis Statements

CLAIMS

Strong Claims (thesis statements) tend to....

- **Make an argument** about how a particular thing (text, video, movie, speech, etc.) works. Try to avoid simple observations or statements that everyone would agree with. Sometimes it's helpful for your first draft of a thesis to simply start with: "In this essay, I argue...."
- **Name important materials** you're working with:
 - A key theory from a particular author;
 - Central text(s) you analyze;
 - Other central materials (interviews, media, research studies, scholarship, stories, anecdotes, etc.)
- **Include some tension.** In other words, you don't want to argue something everyone already agrees with! Some ways to use tension include:
 - Although many people believe X, through studying Y, I have found M...
 - Despite the current research on Y, in my own study, I argue X...
 - Many critical race theorists have defined and explored concept Y; by exploring this comedienne's persona, I aim to extend Y by adding X.
 - My work supports research into X by adding an investigation into area Y. Although I have similar findings as John X, by looking at area Y, I further expand the site of investigation.
- Offer a **very specific explanation of what you've found.** Strong essays tend to develop out of a question, and claims/theses function as an answer to that question. When working with texts, "findings" often means describing how a particular feature of a text or a particular idea works—and why that feature/idea is important. When describing, try to use specific descriptions, adjectives, and words that explain what's significant.
- In claims/theses, findings and arguments tend to be small and nuanced. Don't feel like you need to make a completely new discovery or revelation in your claim! Rather, try to be focused and specific about what you have found through the work you do in your essay.

SOME TEMPLATES

In "title," Author A explores [important larger concept] by using [aspects of the texts/evidence] in order to suggest [argument about larger concept].

In [research area/topic], Authors A, B and C all draw on [term/concept/theory] in order to [X]. Synthesizing their definitions of this [term/concept/theory], I have found [M]. OR, However, [term/concept/theory] is not clearly defined, which leads to problem [Y].

Looking at [research area/topic], we can use Author A's [theory/idea] to help us better understand [concept] in a [specific slightly new way]. Specifically, using [theory/idea] allow us to see [Z] about [research area/topic].

NAME YOUR PROJECT

Being able to talk about what you're *doing as a writer* in your thesis will help you to be able to improve it! Here are some moves that writer's make in thesis sentences (and essays). (These are all from Joseph Harris' book *Rewriting*).

Borrowing—

“When you draw on terms or ideas from other writers to use in thinking through your subject” (39). When applied to claims, you might borrow a term, analytical framework, theory, or concept from one text in order to better understand other sources, research, or a question.

Extending—

Extending is “When you put your own spin on the terms or concepts that you take from other texts” (39). When applied to claims, you might use primary research or a specific text/theory/term to extend the research findings of other sources, the analytical categories of one of your secondary sources, or to extend some of the definitions or terms important to the research area.

Authorizing—

Authorizing is “When you invoke the expertise or status of another writer to support your thinking” (39). When applied to claim-making, you might use your research to authorize the seriousness of a particular social issue, to authorize the findings of your primary research, or to authorize the value of a particular research question/area.

Arguing the Other Side—

This involves “Showing the usefulness of a term or idea that a writer has criticized or noting problems with one that she or he has argued for” (57). In regards to your claims, you can argue alternative interpretations of terms, concepts, ideas, or analysis that might be important for the research area at large.

Uncovering Values—

Uncovering values involves “Surfacing a word or concept for analysis that a text has left undefined or unexamined” (57). In a claim, uncovering values would mean a consideration of the purpose of the undefined term, what is assumed about the term, and why the assumption is problematic or misleading.

Dissenting—

Dissenting involves “Identifying a shared line of thought on an issue in order to note its limits” (57). A claim that dissents should identify the shared line of thinking in the secondary sources and explain why and how it is limited. The template below could be even more interesting if the primary research is what challenged idea M.

ONE EXAMPLE CLAIM

In the news lately, there has been a lot of disparaging of hashtag culture and hashtags as a form of “arm chair” activism, or lazy activism. However, by looking at some of the examples of hashtag protests from Bonilla and Rosa’s “#Ferguson” through the lens of John Del Gandio’s “Activists, Bodies and Political Arguments,” I have found that digital protests that use hashtags are effective because they bring greater awareness to a wider audience of the issue and they also function as, what Del Gandio calls, an important protest signifier.