

Creating a Strong Thesis Statement

Teaching Point(s):

- A strong thesis statement tells the reader how the writer will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.

Standards:

CC.1.4.8.H

Materials:

- Lined paper, writing notebook, and/or journal
- *Creating a Strong Thesis Statement* handout (or teacher-created class poster)
- Student examples/teacher examples/ or *Is This a Strong or Weak Thesis Statement? Sorting Activity* handout
- Overhead or document camera

Connection:

*“Over the past two years, you have written argumentative essays about adolescent health and curfews. And as you know, you will write another argumentative essay regarding Paul Revere. Today, we are going to really be thinking about how a good thesis statement. A **thesis statement** tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion. Think of it as a road map for your paper, in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of your paper. A strong thesis statement directly answers the question asked or you. It is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. A thesis statement has to make a claim that others might dispute and is usually a single sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.”*

Teach/Model:

“No sentence in your paper will cause you as much thought as the thesis sentence. And with good reason: the thesis sentence is typically that ONE sentence in the paper that asserts, controls, and structures the entire argument. Without a strong persuasive, thoughtful thesis, a paper might seem unfocused, weak, and not worth the reader's time. As a writer, there are certain characteristics you can include to create a strong thesis statement.

Distribute *Creating a Strong Thesis Statement* handout (or display poster) and review as a class. Then display the following statement:

Compare and contrast the reasons why the North and South fought the Civil War.

(Teacher modeling with think-aloud):

“Suppose your social studies teacher assigned this essay assignment. After reading all of the informational text and taking notes, you wrote the following (display)

The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different.

This is a weak thesis statement because it just restates the question without providing any additional information. You will expand on this new information in the body of the essay, but it is important that the reader know where you are heading. A reader of this weak thesis might think, “What reasons? How are they the same? How are they different?” Ask yourself these same questions and begin to compare Northern and Southern attitudes (perhaps you first think, “The South believed slavery was right, and the North thought slavery was wrong”). Now, push your comparison toward an interpretation—why did one side think slavery was right and the other side think it was wrong? You look again at the evidence, and you decide that you are going to argue that the North believed slavery was immoral while the South believed it upheld the Southern way of life. And you write the following (display):

While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions.

“Now you have a working thesis! Included in this working thesis is a reason for the war and some idea of how the two sides disagreed over this reason. As you write the essay, you will probably begin to characterize these differences more precisely, and your working thesis may start to seem too vague. You may end up revising the working thesis into a final thesis that really captures the argument in your paper.”

Active Engagement/Guided Practice:

“I am now going to ask you to look at some thesis statements and sort them into a category of strong or weak thesis statement. Use your handout to help you determine if the thesis statement is strong or weak.”

Pass out *Is This a Strong or Weak Thesis Statement? Sorting Activity* handout and go over directions.

OR

Use your own student and teacher examples.

#1 weak – does not make a claim

#2 weak – not a debatable statement but a fact since he does use metaphors to illustrate that one’s wishes and desires can lead to destruction

#3 weak – no claim – no issue to resolve

#4 strong – narrows the subject and identifies the specific causes for the existence of hunger

#5 strong – takes a stand and is specific

#6 weak – reader can’t decide if the essay is about marketing on the Internet or Web pages

Notes:

Adapted from:

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/thesis-statements/>

<https://depts.washington.edu/owrc/Handouts/Developing%20Your%20Thesis.pdf>

<http://blogs.canby.k12.or.us/uploads/stewartc/thesisstatementexamples.pdf>

Creating a Strong Thesis Statement

- ✓ **Did I answer the question?** Rereading the question prompt can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.
- ✓ **Have I taken position that others might challenge or oppose?** If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it's possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.
- ✓ **Is my thesis statement specific enough?** Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like “good” or “successful,” see if you could be more specific: *why* is something “good”; *what specifically* makes something “successful”?
- ✓ **Does my thesis pass the “So what?” test?** If a reader’s first response is, “So what?” then you need to clarify, to establish a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.
- ✓ **Does my thesis pass the “how and why?” test?** If a reader’s first response is “how?” or “why?” your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better view on your position right from the beginning.

Is this a Strong Thesis Statement? Sorting Activity

Directions: Cut out the labels and the sentence strips. Read each sentence strip and place it below the correct label.

Strong Thesis Statement	Weak Thesis Statement
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1. Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn is a great American novel.

2. Langston Hughes uses metaphors to illustrate about how having to postpone one’s wishes or desires can lead to destruction.

3. I’m going to write about Darwin’s concerns with evolution in *The Origin of Species*.

4. Hunger persists in Appalachia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.

5. Because Banana Herb Tea Supplement promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, it poses a potential danger to customers.

6. Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and Web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.
