

# Thesis Statements and Essay Organization

CIN101

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“Academic skills” are **universal** skills with academic **applications**.

# 7 Essential Academic Skills

1. Writing grammatically and coherently
2. Self-editing
3. Researching
4. Assessing and evaluating sources
5. Creating unique and innovative thesis
6. Organizing your papers
7. Understanding assignments

# Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre

Visit the RGASC to get feedback and improve upon your academic skills:

Room 3251, North Building

<http://uoft.me/RGASC>

[academicskills.utm@utoronto.ca](mailto:academicskills.utm@utoronto.ca)

(905) 828-3858

# Some things the RGASC offers

- One-on-one meetings with instructors
- Workshops for skills enhancement, English language learning, writing
- Classroom visits

# Some things the RGASC does NOT do

- Editing
- Proofreading
- Predicting marks
  
- Anything else that violates the principles of academic integrity and respect for instructors and TAs

# CIN101 Drop-ins at the RGASC

Dedicated drop-in hours

- Oct. 29, 2018: 1 PM – 4 PM
- Dec. 3, 2018: 4 PM – 6 PM

You can also [book appointments](#) or come by our general drop-in hours:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/appointments-undergraduate>

# What do you think about thesis statements?

In a university essay, a good thesis statement should:

- A. Be the last sentence in the introduction
- B. Be a maximum of one sentence long
- C. Be written in the passive voice to ensure it is objective
- D. Contain a claim and a strategy for proving it
- E. All of the above



# High School vs. University Essay Expectations

	<b>High School</b>	<b>University</b>
<b>Audience</b>	Uninformed	Informed
<b>Purpose</b>	To inform	To persuade or explain
<b>Basic Material</b>	Information	Argument
<b>Form</b>	5-paragraph or “hamburger” essay	Essay with a thesis, support, pattern of argument Responds to a question or problem

# 7 Writing Skills You Should Demonstrate in First and Second Year Courses

1. Present and defend an “argument”
2. Establish a premise and support it
3. Present your thoughts in an organized and logical manner
4. Show knowledge of “what” the issues are, and “how” events are significant and “how” experts in the field differ in their interpretation of the events’ significance
5. Use knowledge of discipline-specific conventions
6. Understand and apply key critical terms properly
7. Write critically (i.e., objectively assess the value of texts/arguments)

# An Argument is NOT

- An information dump
- A disagreement
- An opinion

# An Argument is

- A piece of writing presented so others can test your claims and reasoning
- Part of the process of sharing knowledge and participation in scholarly conversation
- Your solution to a given problem

# An Argument Is Like

- A conversation with mutual respect (your respect the people and they respect you)
- A conversation with someone interested in your claims
  - But not necessarily convinced by them

Academics talk using arguments!

# 4 Things an Argument Includes

1. Thesis
  - **What** you're arguing
2. Evidence and reasoning
  - **Proof** of what you're arguing
3. Clear strategy for supporting the thesis
  - **How** you're proving what you're arguing
4. Awareness of limits and objections to the thesis
  - The world and its problems are complex

# Thesis

## A thesis

- Answers a question
  - “How” or “Why”, not just “what”, “who”, “where”, “when”
  - “What”, “who”, “where”, “when” questions generate endless description without analysis
- Must be arguable

The reader needs to know these 3 things about your argument:

1. Subject
2. Claim about subject
3. Strategy for proving claim

# What does a thesis statement do?

## Thesis statements

- Present an arguable, interesting, limited claim
- Are accompanied by a strategy for proving that claim
  - Usually include some idea of resources that will be used to do so

## Check out these resources for thesis statements

U of T Writing Advice: Thesis Statements

<http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/planning/thesis-statements/>

UTSC Thesis Statement Tip Sheets

<https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/twc/march-thesis-statement>



# Are these statements arguable?

Ask yourself:

Have I taken a position that others could feasibly challenge or oppose?  
Or am I stating an observation or providing a summary?

- CIN101 is a class that students can take at UTM
- I am going to write about *The Matrix*
- This paper will address the characteristics of a good cinematographer
- Marvel superhero movies have good and bad aspects

# What is this author going to be arguing?

“In this paper I will draw on the work of theorists such as Chang (2010), Rampersaud (2015), and Smith (2013) to argue that while *Wonder Woman* is often presented as a triumph for feminism, it can actually be seen as presenting a more ambiguous perspective when the relations of the various characters are analyzed. Through analyses of the interactional styles and cinematography used to present the three main characters, I will demonstrate that the film’s feminism is only a thin veneer covering a typically Hollywood presentation.”

# How has this author limited the claim?

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# What strategies could the author use?

“In this paper I will draw on the work of theorists such as Chang (2010), Rampersaud (2015), and Smith (2013) to argue that while *Wonder Woman* is often presented as a triumph for feminism, it can actually be seen as presenting a more ambiguous perspective when the relations of the various characters are analyzed. Through analyses of the interactional styles and cinematography used to present the three main characters, I will demonstrate that the film’s feminism is only a thin veneer covering a typically Hollywood presentation.”

What can you predict about what will happen in the paper, based on this introduction?

What is the author going to talk about and how might it be organized?

What do you expect to see in the paper?

# Sample Thesis Statement 1

“Feminism is complicated, and just because a movie seems feminist doesn’t mean that it is really feminist when you look at it closely.”

Based on our discussion,

- What does this statement do well?
- What does it need?

## Sample Thesis Statement 2

“In this paper, I will draw on the work of film theorists such as Rampersaud (2015) and Smith (2013) to argue that films can be marketed as, and seem to be, feminist, even when they are actually not.”

Based on our discussion,

- What does this statement do well?
- What does it need?

# Let the reader know what's coming

Suspense and surprise are great when we're reading fiction, but they are not virtues of academic writing

The readers need to know what you're doing and how you'll do it. This will help them:

- Focus on **understanding your argument** as you present it
- **Assess your argument**, by determining whether you've done what you said you would do

# Thesis or Introductory Paragraph

## **Must Haves**

- Includes thesis statement
- Indicates how you will develop and organize the evidence to support your claim(s)

## **Usually Haves**

- Identifies method, theoretical approach, names or kinds of sources

## **May Haves**

- Include counter-argument



# The “Subject” Part of a Thesis

- May be provided by the assignment question
  - For your assignment, it’s a film of your choice
- Needs to be narrow and focussed
- Needs to be clearly stated
  
- A topic or subject is different from a thesis
  - You can construct any number of theses from the same topic
- A thesis is an argument that’s built upon a subject or topic

# Why is this not a thesis?

This is a topic that is pretending to be a thesis:

“This paper will use postmodern theory to present an interpretation of *Metropolis*.”

# The “Claim” Part of the Thesis

- Answers a question of “who”, “what”, “where”, “when”, or “how”
- Must be arguable
  - i.e., the reader can argue against it (e.g., no, I don’t agree)

# The “Strategy” Part of the Thesis

- Explains “how” or “why” you will develop your argument
- Can indirectly or directly indicate your argumentative strategy
- Your strategy is your answer to this question:  
“How are you going to prove your argument?”

# Thesis Statements

- Tend to be the **first and last things** you work on
- You need at least an idea of what you want to argue to guide your research/writing.
- However, in the process of research/writing, you will hopefully gain understanding and knowledge, meaning that you may want to change your original argument

This is okay!!! This is a sign that you have learned stuff, which is GREAT!

# Thesis Statements and Essay Structure Need to Work Together (Part 1)

- You don't need to stick with your original argument as you write, but you do need to make sure that the thesis and the body of the paper work together in the final draft
- If you work from an outline, you'll want to update your outline as you go, and compare it very closely to what you wrote in your thesis statement
- Is the outline logically developing the argument you make in the thesis?
  - If so, great!
  - If not, you need to change the outline or the thesis

## Thesis Statements and Essay Structure Need to Work Together (Part 2)

- If you don't use an outline, or if you are the kind of writer who deviates from his/her outline, you will want to "reverse outline"
- As you get closer to being done, go through your paragraphs one by one and build an outline out of what you've already written
- Do the paragraphs build up, develop, and support a logical argument?
- Is that argument the same one that you presented in your thesis statement?

# Here's an introductory paragraph

*Ordinary People* is an intelligently acted, well scripted, and critically and financially successful. It is apparently an “honest” look at upper-middle class America, presented as an impartial record of one family’s emotional turmoil and ultimate collapse. Yet, seen from another perspective, this supposedly honest and impartial movie can be viewed as a careful construction of women as agents of disaster or failure. When examined from this point of view, we see that women in *Ordinary People* are consistently seen and shown from a male perspective in which they function mainly to devastate and disrupt the already shaky state of the film’s protagonist, Conrad Jarrett.



# Reflect upon the introductory paragraph

- What is the argument that the author will be proving?
- How will she prove it?
- How will it affect our understanding of the film?
- What do you expect to see in the body of the paper, based on this paragraph?

## 6 Key Takeaways about Thesis Statements and Essay Writing

1. University papers tend to be responses to a problem. This is why they exist, so you need to have everything in a paper working together to advance your argument.
2. Each section of the paper has a job.
3. When you're editing, you can critique your paper by seeing if the jobs have been done.
4. The job of the intro or thesis is to tell the reader what you're talking about (introduce the topic), what you'll be arguing (claim), and how you'll be arguing it (strategy).
5. The job of the body is to bring the thesis to life, to actually do the work you've said you'll do.
6. The conclusion is your change to remind the reader of what was done and why it was effective, and perhaps to suggest next steps.