

Writing Formally

Fall 2009

A series of horizontal lines in teal and white, extending from the right side of the slide towards the center, positioned below the title and above the date.

Overview

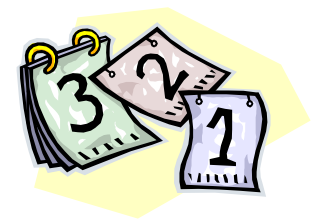
- What does formal writing look like?
- Starting sentences
- How to avoid using “I”
- Thesis Statements
- Hedging
- Transitions

Formal/Academic Writing

- What does it look like?
- In general this means in an essay that you should avoid:
 - a. colloquial words and expressions: "stuff", "a lot of", "thing", "sort of"
 - b. abbreviated forms: "can't", "doesn't", "shouldn't"
 - c. two word verbs: "put off", "bring up"
 - d. sub-headings, numbering and bullet-points
 - e. asking questions
 - f. use of "I", "me", "you", "they", "my", "your", "we"

Never start a sentence with...

- Numbers
 - 19 scientists discovered a cure.
 - Nineteen scientists discovered a cure.
- Dates
 - October 11, 1942, Columbus arrived in America.
 - On October 11, 1942, Columbus arrived in America.
- Conjunctions (and, but, for, or, nor, so, & yet)
 - But the battle was just beginning.
 - The battle was just beginning.



Reporting Verbs—avoid using “I”

- Why don't we want to use “I”? What's wrong with it?
- Is there a difference in these 2 sentences?
 - I think bicycle riding is the ideal form of land transportation.
 - Bicycle riding is the ideal form of land transportation

Thesis Statement



Thesis Statements

- There's no wrong way to eat a Reese's
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HemmX3IoHe8&feature=related>
- But there **is** a wrong way to write a thesis!
 - http://corptrain.phoenix.edu/thesis_generator/thesis_generator.html



Bonus activity

- Myth vs. Fact

Thesis Statement: Myth or Fact?



- Every paper requires one
- It must come at the end of the first paragraph
- A thesis statement must be one sentence in length, no matter how many clauses it contains
- You can't start writing an essay until you have a perfect thesis statement
- A thesis statement must give three points of support

FACT or MYTH?



- Every paper requires one.
- Assignments that ask you to write personal responses or to explore a subject don't want you to seem to pre-judge the issues. Essays of literary interpretation often want you to be aware of many effects rather than seeming to box yourself into one view of the text.
- **MYTH!**
 - It depends on the genre, BUT the academic writing genre **ALWAYS** requires one!

FACT or MYTH?

- A thesis statement must come at the end of the first paragraph.
- This is a natural position for a statement of focus, but it's not the only one. Some theses can be stated in the opening sentences of an essay; others need a paragraph or two of introduction; others can't be fully formulated until the end.



- **MYTH!**

- But in this class you must put it in the first paragraph.

FACT or MYTH?

- A thesis statement must be one sentence in length, no matter how many clauses it contains.
 - Clear writing is more important than rules like these. Use two or three sentences if you need them. A complex argument may require a whole tightly-knit paragraph to make its initial statement of position.
- MYTH- Clarity is KEY.
 - The statement must be identifiable.



FACT or MYTH?



- You can't start writing an essay until you have a perfect thesis statement.
 - It may be advisable to draft a hypothesis or tentative thesis statement near the start of a big project, but changing and refining a thesis is a main task of thinking your way through your ideas as you write a paper. And some essay projects need to explore the question in depth without being locked in before they can provide even a tentative answer.
- **MYTH!**
- You can write it after you've formulated your main points (the body).

FACT or MYTH?

- A thesis statement must give three points of support.
- It should indicate that the essay will explain and give evidence for its assertion, but points don't need to come in any specific number and should not be part of the thesis statement itself. They are often found right after the thesis statement.

▫ MYTH!





The “right way” to create a thesis

- It is a sentence, not a question or phrase.
- It’s “usually” but not “always” a **single** sentence somewhere in your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader.
- It tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.



The “right way” to create a thesis

- It makes a claim that others might dispute.
- It’s a road map for the paper; in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.
- It’s an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be “Good Man is Hard to Find”; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the novel.

How do I know if my thesis is strong?

- Have I taken a 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"?

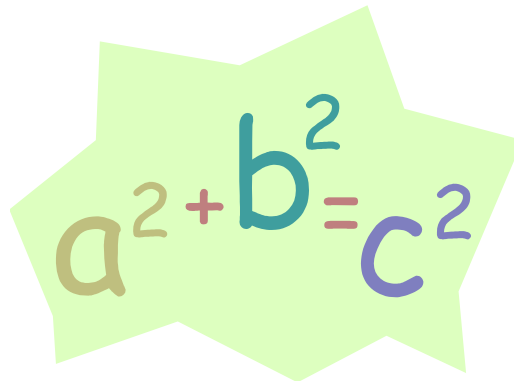


Thesis strength (continued)

- Does my thesis pass the "So what?" test?
 - If a reader's first response is, "So what?" then you need to clarify 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, causing a lack guidance for the reader.
 - The reader should know your position from the beginning.
- Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?
 - If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change.
 - It's o.k. to change your thesis!
 - Don't fall in love with your thesis, be flexible and willing to change it! Keys for Writers p.21

If you like formulas... (you don't have to!)

- Specific topic + Attitude/Angle/Argument = Thesis


$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

Thesis Creation

- Let's think of some appropriate thesis statements for a research topic of your choice!
- Group exercise in thesis creation
 - Write your thesis, and discuss it with a partner. Then, as a class, we will evaluate your thesis based on the guidelines that we discussed.
- For more information, please visit http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml

Group activity 2 (10 minutes)

- *Four groups*
- Create a thesis & possible supports about the following: What is better, having your own vehicle or public transportation?
- Then, two groups will pair together and grade the other group: (Yes or No)
 - Did they take a position you can argue?
 - Is it specific?
 - Does it pass the “So what?” test?
 - Does it pass the “how and why” test?

Having trouble coming up with a thesis?

1. Brainstorm the topic (Diets or language)
2. Narrow the topic (Vegetarian diet or Arabic)
3. Take a position on the topic (*Vegetarian Diets are healthier than omnivore diet or Arabic language has great influence on Farsi and Turkish languages*)
4. Use specific language (academic formal language)
5. Make an assertion based on clearly stated support (Here is where the research is important!)

A strong thesis...

- takes some sort of stand
- justifies discussion
- expresses one main idea
- is specific

Group activity 3

- In four teams, which thesis is better?

Which thesis is better:

1 or 2?

- There are some negative and positive aspects to the Banana Herb Tea Supplement.
- 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.

Which thesis is better:

1 or 2?

- There are some negative and positive aspects to the Banana Herb Tea Supplement.
 - This doesn't take a stand and is vague (“negative and positive”).
- 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.
 - This takes a stand and is specific.

Which thesis is better:

3 or 4?

- While most American families would view consanguine marriage as a threat to the nuclear family structure, many Iranian families, like my own, believe that these marriages help reinforce kinship ties in an extended family.
- My family is an extended family.

Which thesis is better: 3 or 4?

- While most American families would view consanguine marriage as a threat to the nuclear family structure, many Iranian families, like my own, believe that these marriages help reinforce kinship ties in an extended family.
 - This shows how their experience contradicts a widely-held American view. Showing that the topic is controversial helps make a thesis strong.
- My family is an extended family.
 - This just states an observation, and doesn't really make the audience want to keep reading. There is no controversy, no room for discussion.

Which thesis is better: 5 or 6?

- Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and Web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.
- Because the Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using Web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.

Which thesis is better: 5 or 6?

- Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and Web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.
 - This thesis covers several different topics, which makes it weak. It makes it seem like you couldn't decide on a topic when you write a thesis that goes in many directions.
- Because the Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using Web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.
 - This thesis shows the relationship between the two different ideas, making them into one main idea. Using words like: *because*, *since*, *so*, *although*, *unless*, and *however* is very effective in writing a strong thesis.

Which thesis is better: 7 or 8?

- Hunger persists in Glandelinia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.
- World hunger has many causes and effects.

Which thesis is better: 7 or 8?

- Hunger persists in Glandelinia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.
 - This is a has a narrow, manageable topic and offers specific reasons for hunger in a specific place.
- World hunger has many causes and effects.
 - This topic is far too broad, since “world hunger” is such a complicated topic and “causes and effects” are too vague.

Hedging: Do you remember me?

A decorative graphic consisting of a solid teal horizontal bar that spans the width of the slide. Below this bar, on the right side, there are several thin, parallel horizontal lines in shades of teal and white, creating a layered, stepped effect.

Hedging Brainstorm

- What is hedging?
- Why is hedging used?

Hedging

- The dictionary definition:
 - any technique designed to reduce or eliminate financial risk
- How does that apply to writing?
 - Hedges are a device used to lessen the impact of an utterance.
 - Let's look at an informal example:
 - *He is a **slightly** stupid person.*

Language used in Hedging

- **Introductory verbs:**
 - seem, tend, look like, appear to be, think, believe, doubt, be sure, indicate, suggest
- **Certain lexical verbs**
 - believe, assume, suggest
- **Certain modal verbs:**
 - will, must, would, may, might, could
- **Adverbs of frequency**
 - often, sometimes, usually
- **Modal adverbs**
 - certainly, definitely, clearly, probably, possibly, perhaps, conceivably
- **Modal adjectives**
 - certain, definite, clear, probable, possible
- **Modal nouns**
 - assumption, possibility, probability
- **That clauses**
 - It could be the case that ...It might be suggested that ...There is every hope that
- **To-clause + adjective**
 - It may be possible to obtain...It is important to develop ...It is useful to study

Hedging Comparison

- Let's identify the hedging and talk about how it changes the statement.
 1. The commitment to some of the social and economic concepts was less strong than it is now.

It may be said that the commitment to some of the social and economic concepts was less strong than it is now.

2. The lives they chose seem overly self-denying to most women today.

The lives they chose may seem overly self-denying to most women today.

More Hedging Comparison

3. Weismann proved that animals become old because, if they did not, there could be no evolution.

Weismann suggested that animals become old because, if they did not, there could be no evolution.

4. Yet a recalcitrant trustee did not remain in possession of the property entrusted to him.

Yet often it cannot have been the case that a recalcitrant trustee remained in possession of the property entrusted to him.

Still More Hedging Comparison

5. Recent work on the religious demography of Northern Ireland shows a separating out of protestant and catholic.

Recent work on the religious demography of Northern Ireland indicates a separating out of protestant and catholic.

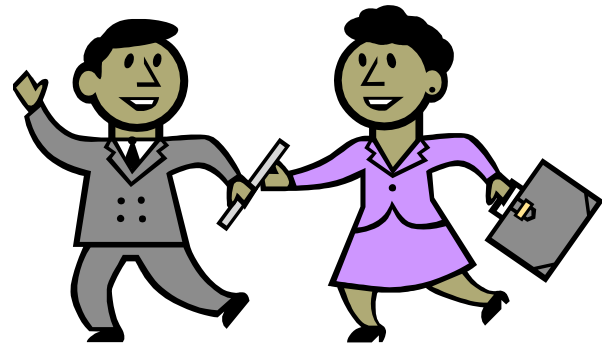
- What is the purpose of hedging?
- How does hedging effect the meaning of these statements?

Transitions Brainstorm

What are they?

What do they do?

Why are they important?



Transitions

- Transitions make logical connections between paragraphs
- Transitions signal relationships between ideas
- Transitions provide the reader with directions for how to piece together your ideas into a logically coherent argument.
- In providing the reader with these important cues, transitions help readers understand the logic of how your ideas fit together.

Example



- *Keys for Writers*, p.36
- 1st paragraph topic: the expense of exploring Mars
- New paragraph topic: the hazards of climbing Mt. Everest
- **Reader will be confused right?** You need to show how these topics connect to each other and to the thesis—the overall picture.
- **Transition after 1st paragraph, before 2nd paragraph:** “Exploration on our own planet can be as hazardous and as financially risky as space exploration.”

Tip on Transition Writing

- Since the clarity and effectiveness of your transitions will depend greatly on how well you have organized your paper, you may want to evaluate your paper's organization before you work on transitions.

This is Very Helpful!

- In the margins of your draft, summarize in a word or short phrase what each paragraph is about or how it fits into your analysis as a whole. This exercise should help you to see the order of and connection between your ideas more clearly.