

THREE WAYS OF PHRASING A THESIS STATEMENT

Adapted from *The Genre of Argument* by Professor Irene Clark.

Three useful ways to phrase a thesis are as a *simple thesis* statement, as an *expanded thesis statement*, and as an *expanded thesis statement using the word “although.”*

A SIMPLE THESIS STATEMENT

A simple thesis statement, as its name suggests, is a presentation of a position or main idea stated as a simple sentence. Brian, who is writing an essay about why he wants to transfer from one university to another, may state his thesis this way:

Northern College is a better choice for me than is State University.

For other topics, examples of simple thesis statements are as follows:

1. Speech codes are an acceptable feature of campus life.
2. Marijuana ought to be legalized.
3. Immigration laws in California should be more restrictive.

A simple thesis statement presents a main idea or position, but it gives no hint of a writer’s reasons, nor does it give readers a sense of what the structure of the essay is going to be.

THE EXPANDED THESIS STATEMENT

A more elaborate type of thesis statement is the expanded thesis, which uses the word *because*. Writing an expanded thesis can be a useful way of clarifying an argument for yourself because it forecasts what you plan to say. Here are some examples of how a simple thesis may be stated as an expanded thesis. Brian’s expanded thesis:

Northern College is a better choice for me than is State *because* it offers programs in environmental studies, which is the field I wish to enter.

Expanded theses concerned with other topics:

Thesis Statements 2

1. Speech codes are an acceptable feature of campus life *because* creating a harmonious climate is more important than free speech.
2. Marijuana ought to be legalized *because* it has many medical benefits and *because* enforcement of restrictive laws is too expensive.
3. Immigration laws in California should be more restrictive *because* the local economy cannot afford to support illegal immigrants.

In an expanded thesis statement, the use of the word *because* indicates a *relationship* between the two parts of the thesis—the main ideas and the reasons that will be used to support it. This relationship can be suggested in other ways. For example, Brian could have written an expanded thesis as follows:

Northern College offers programs in environmental studies, has smaller class size, and fosters close interaction between professors and students. Therefore, it is a better college for me.

or

Northern College offers programs in environmental studies, has smaller class size, and fosters close interaction between professors and students, so it is a better college for me.

THESIS STATEMENTS USING “ALTHOUGH”

Another useful word that helps you to clarify the goals of your thesis is *although*. *Although* often appears in a thesis statement to indicate how the thesis will differ from what is generally believed about the subject or how the thesis will differ from the *opposing viewpoint*. A reference to what is generally believed or to what an opponent may believe is characteristic of the genre of argument because it focuses attention on the viewpoint being refuted. Here are some examples of how the word *although* can help to focus a thesis statement:

Brian’s Expanded Thesis Using “Although”

Thesis Statements 3

Although State College has an excellent reputation, Northern College is a better choice for me because it offers programs in environmental studies, has smaller class size, and fosters close interaction between professors and students.

Expanded Theses for Argumentative Essays Using “Although”

1. *Although* speech codes may sometimes interfere with the First Amendment right to free speech, they are an acceptable feature of campus life because creating a harmonious climate is more important.
2. *Although* marijuana has been considered a dangerous drug, it ought to be legalized because it has many medical benefits and because enforcement of restrictive laws is too expensive.
3. *Although* the United States has always offered a haven to immigrants, immigration laws in California should be more restrictive because the local economy cannot afford to support illegal immigrants.

Like *because*, the word *although* can be implied in other ways. Here is an example of Brian’s thesis that implies the word *although* without actually using the word:

Despite the fact that State College has an excellent reputation, Northern College is a better choice for me because it offers programs in environmental studies, has smaller class size, and fosters interaction between professors and students.

The use of the word *although* indicates to the reader that the writer is aware of the complexity of the topic and understands that others may have different points of view. *Although* therefore renders the thesis statement more “polite” or “judicious”. When writing an argumentative essay, you are more likely to have an impact on your readers by acknowledging their viewpoint and indicating that you understand and respect it, not by telling them that they are wrong. Argumentative essays are usually concerned with complex and controversial subjects about which the “truth” is difficult to “know” with absolute certainty. Thus, a thesis for an argumentative essay is

Thesis Statements 4

one with which at least a some people are likely to disagree, and often a position that one person may view as absolutely right may be viewed by another person as absolutely wrong. Therefore, you will be more successful if you approach your subject politely and judiciously, indicate you understand the complexity of the subject, and acknowledge that you are aware of other points of view. The word *although* helps you to frame thesis statements that accomplish this purpose.