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Zoom Meeting 1b

Writing Seminar 1: Crafting an Effective Thesis Statement

The meeting will begin soon.

Zoom Meeting Information

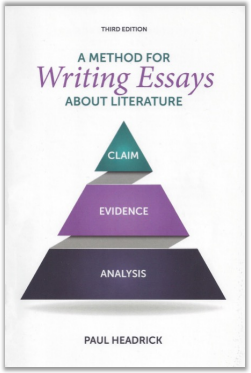
- Zoom Meetings are about 60 minutes long and are recorded.
- Recordings and PowerPoints are posted on onQ (under "Content" > "Zoom Meetings").
- Participate in the discussion by using the "Chat" window or by raising your hand under "React."
- Attendance will be taken at a random point in the meeting; your camera may be on or off.

Zoom Meetings

Please see the Course Syllabus for specific dates and times

Informational	Writing Seminars	Reading Seminars
Intro to the Course	**1b. Writing Seminar 1** (Crafting an Effective Thesis Statement)	**1c. Reading Seminar 1**
1a. Academic Integrity		
2a. Midcourse Exam Info Session	**2b. Writing Seminar 2** (Structuring an Analytical Essay)	**2c. Reading Seminar 2**
3a. TA Check-In	**3b. Writing Seminar 3** (Claim, Evidence, and Analysis)	**3c. Reading Seminar 3**
4a. Final Exam Info Session	**4b. Writing Seminar 4** (Some Notes on Grammar and Style)	**4c. Reading Seminar 4**

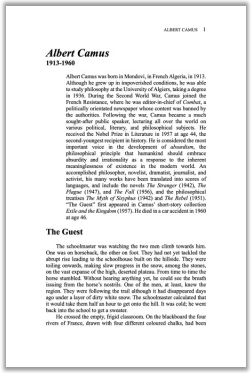
🕮 Headrick, *A Method for Writing Essays About Literature*



Writing Seminar 1

- **Chapter 1: Audience and the Literary Analysis Essay**
  - The Importance of Audience
  - The Audience for the Literary Analysis Essay
- **Chapter 3: Theme**
  - Defining Theme
  - Debating Theme
  - Identifying Themes
  - A Checklist for Effective Statements of Theme
- **Appendix 2: Sample Essays**
  - A Literary Analysis Essay on a Short Story

🕮 Camus, "The Guest" (1957)



ALBERT CAMUS 1

Albert Camus
1913-1960

Albert Camus was born in Mondovi, in French Algeria, in 1913. Although he grew up in impoverished conditions, he was able to study philosophy at the University of Algiers, taking a degree in 1936. During the Second World War, Camus joined the French Resistance, where he was editor-in-chief of *Combat*, a politically orientated newspaper whose content was banned by the authorities. Following the war, Camus became a much sought-after public speaker, lecturing all over the world on the philosophy of the absurd. Camus died in a car crash. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957 at age 44, the second-youngest recipient in history. He is considered the most important voice in the development of absurdism, the philosophical principle that humankind should embrace absurdity and irrationality as a response to the inherent meaninglessness of existence in the modern world. An accomplished philosopher, novelist, dramatist, journalist, and activist, his many works have been translated into scores of languages, and include the novels *The Stranger* (1942), *The Plague* (1947), and *The Fall* (1956), and the philosophical treatises *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) and *The Rebel* (1951). "The Guest" first appeared in Camus' short-story collection *Exile and the Kingdom* (1957). He died in a car accident in 1960 at age 46.

The Guest

The schoolmaster was watching the two men climb towards him. One was on horseback, the other on foot. They had not yet tackled the abrupt rise leading to the schoolhouse built on the hillside. They were toiling onwards, making slow progress in the snow, among the stones, on the vast expanse of the high, deserted plateau. From time to time the horse stumbled. Without hearing anything yet, he could see the breath issuing from the horse's nostrils. One of the men, at least, knew the region. They were following the trail although it had disappeared days ago under a layer of dirty white snow. The schoolmaster calculated that it would take them half an hour to get onto the hill. It was cold; he went back into the school to get a sweater.

He crossed the empty, frigid classroom. On the blackboard the four rivers of France, drawn with four different coloured chalks, had been

onQ > "Content" > "Course Readings"

Synopsis

Balducci (an officer) and a prisoner ascend a rocky slope in Algeria to meet Daru (a teacher). Balducci tells Daru that he is ordered by the government to take the prisoner to the police. Daru asks about the prisoner's crime, and Balducci says that it was a domestic matter, not political. As Balducci is leaving, Daru tells him that he will not take the prisoner to the police. Daru shelters the prisoner for the night. In the morning, Daru sets him free, telling him he can either turn himself in to the police or hide with the nomads. Later, Daru sees the prisoner heading east, most likely to turn himself in. When Daru looks at the blackboard in his classroom, he sees the message, "You have turned in our brother. You will pay."

Essay Structure

introductory paragraph	attention-getting remark
	contextualizing information
	thesis statement
analytical paragraphs	claim
	evidence
	analysis
concluding paragraph	thesis statement
	contextualizing information
	attention-getting remark

- most analytical essays contain three components, each of which contains its own three components
- analytical essays are thus highly structured rhetorically
  - each component has a specific role to play
- be sure your analytical essays contain all of these components, in this order

Thesis Statement

introductory paragraph	attention-getting remark
	contextualizing information
	thesis statement
analytical paragraphs	claim
	evidence
	analysis
concluding paragraph	thesis statement
	contextualizing information
	attention-getting remark

- a single sentence that clearly and concisely indicates the central argument of the essay
- not the same thing as a topic:
  - must be argumentative
  - must take a clear position on some significant issue
  - must answer the questions "Why?" and/or "How?", and not just "What?"
- characterized by all four of "the Four S's": significant, single, specific, and supportable

Thesis Statement

- can sometimes be two sentences in longer essays, but one sentence is sufficient for short essays
- provides an answer to a question, a solution to a problem, and/or a statement that takes a clear position on a debatable topic
- articulates the main argument of an essay, which the body of the essay will go on to dissect and defend in its sub-arguments

• a single sentence that clearly and concisely indicates the central argument of the essay
• not the same thing as a topic: – must be argumentative – must take a clear position on some significant issue – must answer the questions "Why?" and/or "How?", and not just "What?"
• characterized by all four of "the Four S's": significant, single, specific, and supportable

Thesis Statement

Topics	Thesis Statements
discursive or descriptive	argumentative or debatable
broad and general	narrow and concise
answer the question "What?"	answer the questions "Why?" and/or "How?"

• a single sentence that clearly and concisely indicates the central argument of the essay
• not the same thing as a topic: – must be argumentative – must take a clear position on some significant issue – must answer the questions "Why?" and/or "How?", and not just "What?"
• characterized by all four of "the Four S's": significant, single, specific, and supportable

Thesis Statement

significant	single
should deal with an important problem or issue in the literary text(s)	should consider one issue only, rather than attempt multiple issues
specific	**supportable**
should consider as narrow an issue as possible, not a generalized issue	should be defensible through evidence from the text(s)

- a single sentence that clearly and concisely indicates the central argument of the essay
- not the same thing as a topic:
  - must be argumentative
  - must take a clear position on some significant issue
  - must answer the questions "Why?" and/or "How?", and not just "What?"
- characterized by all four of "the Four S's": significant, single, specific, and supportable

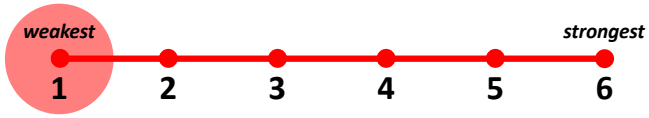
Thesis Tests

The "So What?" Test

- If the thesis statement prompts the question, "So What?" from a theoretical reader, it is probably insufficiently argumentative.
- It may mean that the thesis statement has not taken an identifiable position on a salient or relevant issue in the literary text.
- Revise your thesis statement to make it more argumentative.

The Counterargument Test

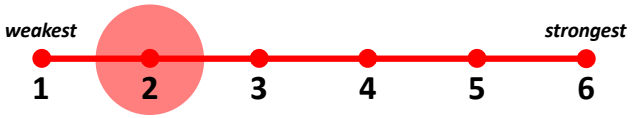
- If there is no apparent valid counterargument to the thesis statement, it is probably insufficiently argumentative.
- It may mean that the thesis statement is too descriptive, discursive, or factual, rather than truly argumentative or debatable.
- Revise your thesis statement to make it more argumentative.



Draft Thesis 1

✗ How does Camus engage with the theme of freedom in "The Guest"?

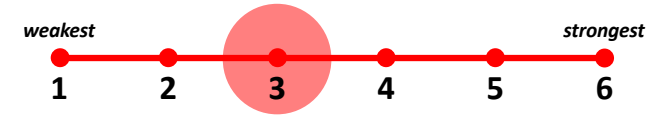
- **Avoid phrasing a thesis statement as a question:** an effective thesis statement should provide a specific answer to a question, not pose a question
- **Conclusion:** Draft Thesis 1 is phrased as a question and therefore does not provide a specific answer to a question



Draft Thesis 2

✗ This essay will examine how Camus engages with the theme of freedom in "The Guest."

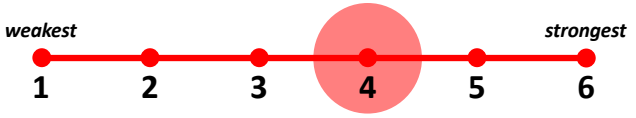
- **Avoid "This essay will …":** constitutes *signposting*, telling the reader "out loud" what the essay will do at some unspecified future point
- **Avoid words "why" and "how":** thesis statements should answer these questions, not just indicate them as vague or undefined points of focus
- **Conclusion:** Draft Thesis 2 is vague and undefined because it makes use of signposting and the word "how"



Draft Thesis 3

✗ Freedom is a significant theme in Camus's "The Guest."

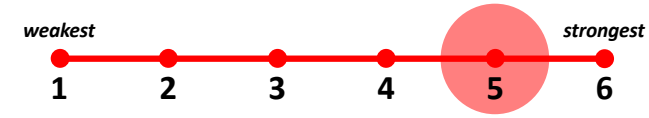
- **Apply the "So What?" Test:** this topic is significant to the story, but to what end? Why or how is it significant?
- **Apply the Counterargument Test:** to argue that this topic is not significant to the story is invalid, as it is patently obvious that it is significant
- **Conclusion:** Draft thesis 3 is vague and observational rather than concise and argumentative



Draft Thesis 4

✗ "The Guest" engages with the theme of the limitations of freedom.

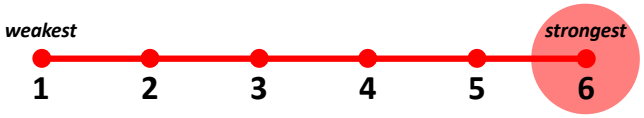
- **Apply the "So What?" Test:** the story does engage with this theme, but to what end? What, exactly, is the story saying about this theme?
- **Apply the Counterargument Test:** to suggest that the story does not engage with this theme is invalid because it is patently obvious that it does so
- **Conclusion:** Draft thesis 4 is insufficiently concise and argumentative



Draft Thesis 5

✗ "The Guest" provides an important commentary on the limitations of freedom and the importance of fostering human connections.

- **Apply the "So What?" Test:** the story is providing a commentary, but what is that commentary? Why is it important?
- **Apply the Counterargument Test:** to suggest that the story does not provide this important commentary is invalid because it turns on a value judgement
- **Conclusion:** Draft Thesis 5 is still vague and unclear because it does not adequately define "powerful statement"



Draft Thesis 6

✓ "The Guest" contends that although individuals might conceive of themselves as free, they are inescapably connected to the people around them, and must accept and foster these attachments.

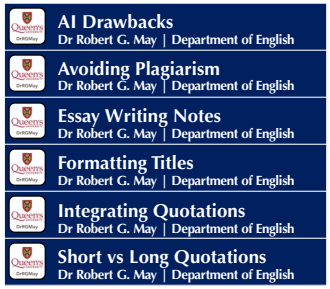
- **Apply the "So What?" Test:** passes test because it articulates a clear theme phrased as a complete thought
- **Apply the Counterargument Test:** passes test because another critic could potentially advance a different, equally valid interpretation of the significance of this theme in the story
- **Conclusion:** Draft thesis 6 is a strong thesis because it is concise and argumentative

For More Information

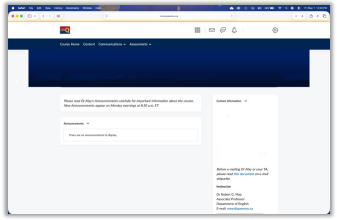
The Purdue Online Writing Lab
https://owl.purdue.edu/

- **Tips and Examples for Writing Thesis Statements:** General Writing > The Writing Process > Creating a Thesis Statement
- **Developing Strong Thesis Statements:** General Writing > Academic Writing > Establishing Arguments
- **Developing a Thesis for a Literary Paper:** Subject-Specific Writing > Writing in Literature > Writing in Literature

Dr May's Class Web Site
https://www.queensu.ca/academia/drrgmay/docs/



Quiz 1



https://onq.queensu.ca

- Test your knowledge of Writing Seminar 1 by writing Quiz 1.
- Access the Quiz on onQ (under "Assessments" > "Quizzes").
- The Quiz consists of a series of multiple-choice questions.
- The suggested due date for this Quiz is soon, but you may complete it anytime until the last day of class (see onQ for specific dates).
- All Quizzes count towards your final grade in the course.

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