

How to write a thesis statement

Religion 274

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wac

c4w

writing initiatives

webmail

efs

I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian

Recent presentations

This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

Books

This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited



Blog: Thinking About Writing

A new blog on writing-related issues

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html>

Writing Across the Curriculum



The screenshot shows the website header with the University of Alberta logo and the text "Writing Initiatives University of Alberta" and "Writing Across the Curriculum". Below the header is a green navigation bar with links: Home, Presentations, Other Programs, Resources by Subject, and Contact Us. The main content area has a yellow breadcrumb trail "Home > Home". On the left is a green sidebar with links: C4W, WRS Courses, Roger Graves, Blog, and Academic Honesty. The main text area contains a timestamp "Today: 9/2/2009 10:31:23 AM", a question about improving student writing, contact information for Roger Graves, and two sections of bullet points: "What can we do for individual instructors:" and "What can we do for departments:". At the bottom of the main content area is the heading "Upcoming Presentations and Workshops:".

<http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/WAC/>

Centre for Writers



Writing Initiatives
University of Alberta



Centre for Writers

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Welcome to the Centre for Writers

We offer **free** one-on-one writing coaching and support to all students, instructors and staff at the University of Alberta - in any faculty or at any level of study.

Our writing coaches are available to assist clients with higher order concerns in their writing, such as thesis formation, organization and idea development, as well as more specific details, like grammar and documentation style. Clients can bring in any writing project at any stage of development: essays, lab reports, creative pieces, scholarly articles, thesis drafts, application letters - and more. Our coaches will also help students read instructor comments on already-graded papers. ESL and EAL students are welcome!

Request a class room visit by a tutor.

Welcome back for the Fall 2009 term! Tutoring hours will begin on Monday, September 14. The online appointment-booking schedule will be available to clients as soon as possible prior to this date. We look forward to working with you!

9/2/2009 10:34:15 AM

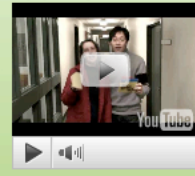
Express News

Twitter Updates

The Centre for Writers will open for the fall term on Monday, September 14! 5 days ago

[follow me on Twitter](#)

GramWOW



<http://www.c4w.arts.ualberta.ca/>

GRAM WOW!



Note the verbs: Critical analysis

- Examine
- Analyze
- Critically analyze
- Historically analyze
- Assess
- Interpret
- Debate
- Consider
- Illustrate
- Evaluate
- Identify

What do these terms mean to you?

Invention: Generate ideas

- **What** were the unique problems for the dissemination of classical music in America at the turn of the century?
- Brainstorm, idea maps, questions
 - ✦ Affordability of live music
 - ✦ Live music not transportable, into the home
 - ✦ Personal preference hard to satisfy (few choices)
 - ✦ Few concert halls in US didn't stock black performers (choice/selection)
 - ✦ Pg 53—unique problems comment

Invention

- **What** were the qualities of recorded music that overcame these difficulties?

- ✦ Reproducibility
- ✦ Mass production
- ✦ **Portability**
- ✦ Durability
- ✦ **Repeatability** (Ch. 2)
- ✦ **Low cost**
- ✦ Access
- ✦ Market = variety
- ✦ 3 qualities listed in text (Ch 2)

Invention

- Use one example from the text to **outline** and **define** each of these phonographic qualities.
- Examples (ch 2):
 1. How musicians shaped compositions to reflect technical limits of the time —**Stravinsky**
 2. Grown men ghost conducting
 3. Annie Greenwood educational subsidy
 4. Defy racism by providing greater access
 5. “Audiophile” as an idea develops

Thesis statement



Working thesis:

- The phonograph allowed music to cross racial barriers because it was affordable, reproduceable, and portable. By playing records that Black people could afford on their low incomes, the phonograph enabled non-traditional populations to hear and perform this music. These phonographs were also relatively light—not iPod light, but portable nonetheless—and this allowed the records to move into the home.

Invention: Magliocco

- ✦ Using Magliocco, **identify** and **summarize** reasons why people practice contemporary neo-pagan witchcraft
- ✦ **Speculate** as to why this might be threatening to some

Thesis on Magliocco



Invention: Levack

- ✦ **Define** witchcraft in medieval/early modern Europe based on information from one of the following chapters from Levack
 - ✦ Power of the devil—evil not good things
 - ✦ Exploitation of secret powers in nature
 - ✦ Unnatural—anything; flying to a group gathering
 - ✦ Turning people into frogs and newts
 - ✦ Blame for bad crops
 - ✦ Conjuring people
 - ✦ Forcing people against their will
- ✦ **Evaluate** this perspective as a contemporary: is it credible?

Thesis on Levack

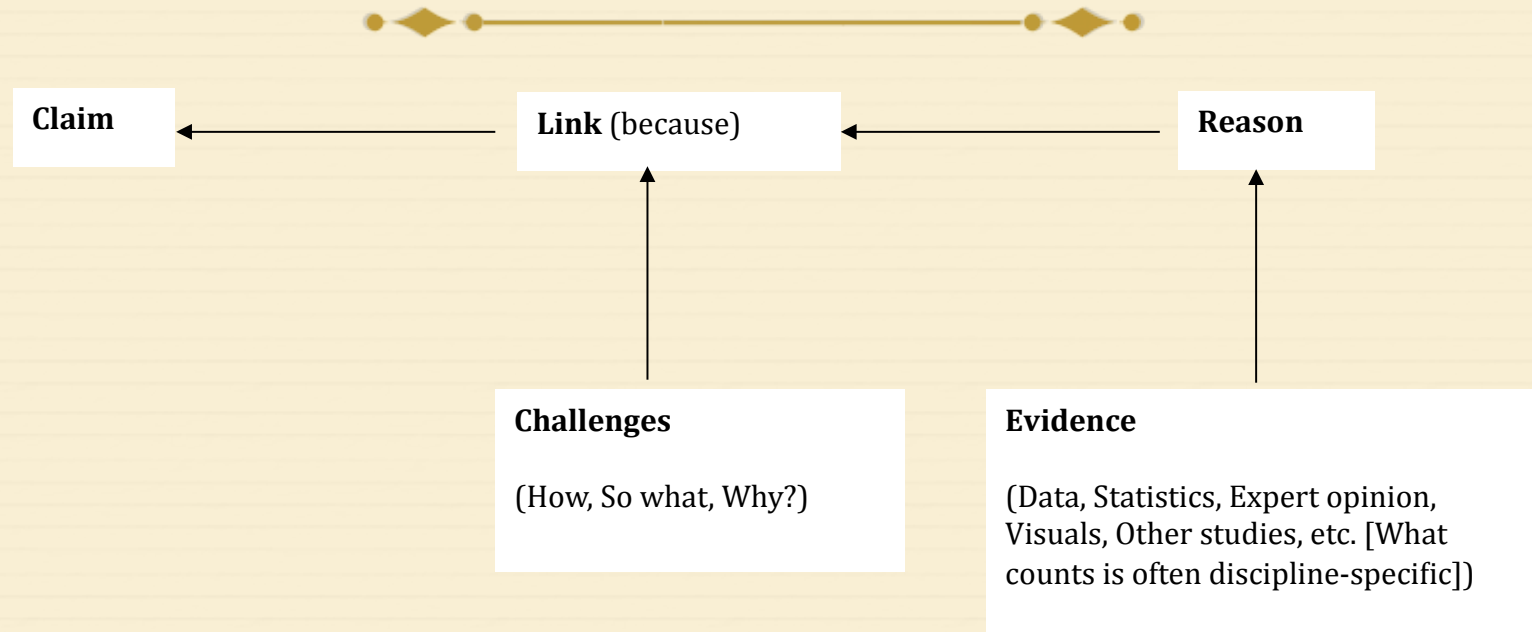


- ✦ Witchcraft was defined as someone using otherworldly powers to bring down other people, including using spells, alchemy, divination, and astrology. To the average person living in the time of the black plague, this would have seemed reasonable.

Your argument

- Main claim
- Subsidiary claims

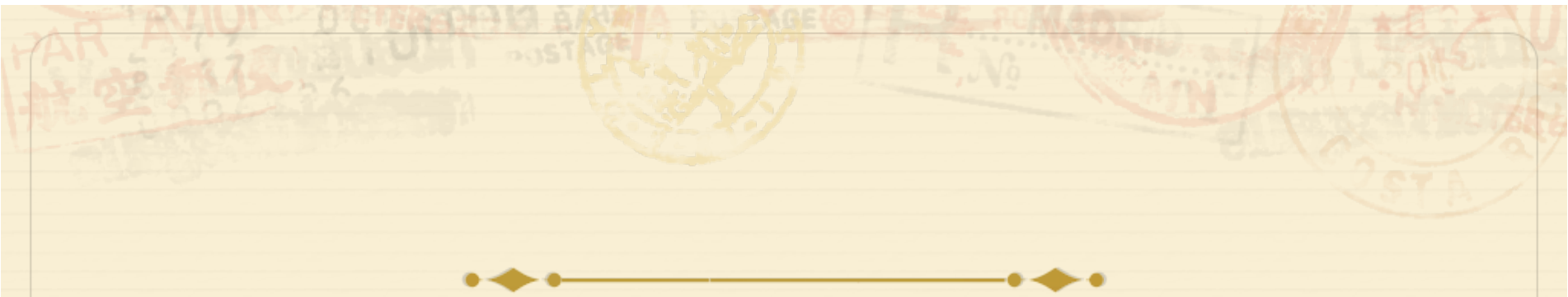
Informal Argument and Academic Writing



Ex. [this study] will be a unique scholarly contribution as very few studies genuinely combine oral history and the documentary record.

What topic will you study?

- ✦ Identify a topic of inquiry
- ✦ Translate that topic into a thesis by stating what your attitude is to that topic
- ✦ In this essay I will analyze how leisure and vice combined to form what have been called “sinful pleasures” in the boom-town gold rush economy of the Klondike. The absence of traditional social hierarchies in this time and place, combined with the fuel of easy money and masculinity, accounted for this new conception of leisure.

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- ✦ Magic as a transformation of the mind
 - ✦ Christianization of pagan rituals
 - ✦ History of religious practices isn't progressive from one religious practice to another—it is not a linear progression.
 - ✦ Many of the traditional practices of the Christian holidays—the date, the tree, the star-- arose from pagan traditions. Co-opted and incorporated

Claims and Assumptions



- Claim + stated reason rest upon an unstated reason
- Both the stated and unstated reasons rely on shared assumptions of value between the writer and the reader
- Evidence demonstrates the validity of the stated or unstated reasons
- When values are shared, less evidence is needed to convince the reader

A claim in 3 parts

- ✦ By engaging in historical/archival research, by reviewing the vast amount of public information now available on [this topic], and by conducting interviews with policy makers, researchers, activists and industry representatives, **my research will develop a systematic assessment** of [topic] and the conditions in which it has become finalized.

Getting organized

- Thesis= main claim, argument
The absence of traditional social hierarchies in this time and place, combined with the fuel of easy money and masculinity, accounted for this new conception of leisure
- Body: subsidiary claims
 1. Free enterprise capitalism in the Klondike contributed to a dominant ideological stance that valued the free choice of the individual to pursue whatever leisure activities they wanted—including gambling, drinking to excess, and womanizing—with few, if any, restraints.
 2. Leisure in the Klondike boomtown created and enforced a particular kind of masculinity in contrast to the “rational recreation” of more established cities and towns in the Northwest.

Body—Part 1

- Free enterprise capitalism in the Klondike contributed to a dominant ideological stance that valued the free choice of the individual to pursue whatever leisure activities they wanted—including gambling, drinking to excess, and womanizing—with few, if any, restraints.

Implied in this claim is the structure (order) of the next part of the essay:

1. A section or paragraph on gambling
2. A section or paragraph on drinking to excess
3. A section or paragraph on womanizing/sexual debauchery

Thesis statements that suck

