Hello. This is Gary Enns of Cerro Coso Community College, and I would like to lead you through this helpful lesson on creating a thesis statement for an expository essay. It is my hope that by the end of this lesson, you will understand what a thesis statement is, why it is essential to an essay, and how to craft a clear thesis.

In part one of this presentation, I will define “thesis statement” and explain the three essential parts of a solid thesis. In part two, I will provide you with a handy formula and some tips on how to develop your own thesis statements.

SLIDE 2

What is a thesis?

At its most basic level, a thesis is simply the claim that you wish your readers to accept about your subject. This claim is stated clearly, usually in one sentence.

Consider your thesis as the “main road sign” of your essay. Road signs help us navigate through unfamiliar territory. Like a road sign, the thesis helps your readers navigate through the unfamiliar territory of your topic.

Your thesis is the most important sentence in your essay. Clearly stated, the thesis will assure readers that they are headed in a meaningful direction.

SLIDE 3

Consider the following example:

“Golden retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs because of their intelligence, their loyalty, and their mild manner.”

SLIDE 4
A good thesis requires evidence.

The seeing-eye dog example makes a fine thesis because it is an idea which requires the writer to provide evidence, or proof, in order for readers to accept it as valid. Evidence can take many forms such as reasons, examples, names of experts, statistics, stories, and sensory details.

Writing a clear, focused thesis statement can give you, the writer, something to develop. It gives you a sense of purpose and direction.

What if the writer had instead written,

“Golden retrievers can serve as guide dogs.”

Well, this is a fact, but there is no clear idea here, no opinion, nothing to really develop in an essay. So a thesis needs to be more than a simple statement of fact.

SLIDE 5

A thesis statement has three essential parts to be considered a thesis: your topic; your opinion about your topic; and a plan statement. Let’s take a look at each part separately and then put them together.

SLIDE 6

The first essential element of a thesis is your “topic.” Your topic by itself is simply the subject of a conversation, uncolored by opinion or attitude. People can have a variety of opinions or attitudes about a topic, but by itself, a topic lacks an idea. For instance, “seeing-eye dogs” is a topic, by itself. The writer hasn’t yet expressed an idea about seeing-eye dogs.

SLIDE 7

The second essential element is “your opinion or attitude” about the topic. What is it you, the writer, wish to express about your topic?

An opinion is one of many possible opinions. For instance, if you feel golden retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs, someone else may disagree and feel that Labrador retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs. Another person may have a wonderful Australian shepherd seeing-eye dog and feel that that particular breed makes the best seeing-eye dog.

So a thesis states an opinion. And because an opinion is arguable, it requires evidence in order to be accepted. It wouldn’t be enough for our sample writer to say, “Golden retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs, case closed.” The burden of proof is on the writer, and he or she must provide solid evidence to support the claim.

You, the writer, are responsible for convincing your readers that you opinion is plausible.

SLIDE 8

The third and final element of a thesis statement is your “plan statement.”
I may be mixing a metaphor here, but consider your plan statement as a road map of what is to come in your essay. Before we head off on a road trip across the country, we usually consult a map so we have a sense of where we are going. With a map, we can make a plan for our journey. We know where we will stop to see important tourist sights, we can pace our days, and we can make reservations at hotels. A road map is a wonderful planning tool for a trip.

Your plan statement within your thesis is the road map that you are providing for your readers so that they know where they are headed. Your plan statement telegraphs the main supporting points you will be making, in the order they will appear.

In our example, “Golden retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs because of their intelligence, their loyalty, and their mild manner,” the writer is previewing the points to come. First, the essay will discuss the intelligence of the breed. Next, the essay will discuss the loyalty of the breed. And finally, the essay will discuss the mild manner of the breed. Each main point will help to support the overall idea that “Golden retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs.”

SLIDE 9

A little more about plan statements.

The plan statement is most often an essential part of the thesis sentence, but in actuality, it can also be expressed in its own sentence. For instance,

“Golden retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs because of their intelligence, their loyalty, and their mild manner.”

can also be expressed as

“Golden retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs. Because of their intelligence, their loyalty, and their mild manner, they are the easiest breed to train and to trust.”

Which technique you choose depends on the situation. For instance, if your thesis statement feels too long to you, you might consider breaking it into two sentences. Use your intuition to decide which method works best for each essay you write.

That’s it for Part 1 of “How to Create a Thesis Statement.” In this part, I have defined “thesis statement” and explained the three essential parts of a solid thesis. Now, be sure to move on to Part 2, where I will provide you with a handy formula and some tips on how to develop your own thesis statements for your essays.
PART 2

SLIDE 10

Welcome back. This is Part 2 of the lesson, “How to Create a Thesis Statement.”

In part one of this presentation, I defined “thesis statement” and explained the three essential parts of a solid thesis: topic, opinion, and plan statement. In this part, I will provide you with a handy thesis formula and some tips on how to develop your own thesis statements for your essays.

Let’s continue.

SLIDE 11

There is a simple thesis formula that you can use in order to make sure you have included the three essential thesis elements:

Your Topic + Your Opinion + Your Plan Statement = THESIS!

This is an easy formula to remember. You can use it at any point in the writing process to make sure you have a clearly stated focus for your essay.

SLIDE 12

In the next three slides I have listed three examples of the thesis formula in use. We have seen this first example already. Here it is again, with the thesis elements labeled.

“Golden retrievers make the best seeing-eye dogs because of their intelligence, their loyalty, and their mild manner.”

The three essential elements are clearly expressed in one sentence.

“Seeing-eye dogs” is the topic, “Golden retrievers make the best” is the opinion, and “intelligence, loyalty, and mild manner” is the plan statement for the essay. The writer can now develop the three points of the plan statement, in the same order, within the body of the essay.

SLIDE 13

Here is another example of the thesis formula at work:

“A lack of sleep can be highly detrimental to a person’s wellbeing due to the serious side effects involved, including lowered cognitive abilities, a general inability to focus, and significantly deteriorated health.”

Again, the three essential elements of a thesis are clearly expressed in one sentence.

“Sleep deprivation,” expressed here as “a lack of sleep,” is the topic, “it is detrimental to a person’s wellbeing due to the serious side effects” is the opinion, and “lowered cognitive abilities, a general inability to focus, and significantly deteriorated health” are the three points to be developed in the essay, all expressed here in the plan statement portion of the thesis.
SLIDE 14

And here is a final example of the thesis formula at work:

“Thomas Jefferson’s message regarding the importance of virtue and honesty, education, and physical exercise is as likely to guide a modern youth to personal achievement and accomplishment as it was his nephew over two hundred years ago.”

In this example, the writer expresses the topic and plan together in, “Thomas Jefferson’s message regarding the importance of virtue and honesty, education, and physical exercise.” The opinion is clearly expressed: Jefferson’s message “is as likely to guide a modern youth to personal achievement and accomplishment as it was his nephew over two hundred years ago.”

SLIDE 15

Putting It All Together, Step 1

To build your own thesis, first decide on a topic. In this lesson, we have seen the following sample topics: “seeing-eye dogs,” “sleep deprivation,” and “Thomas Jefferson’s message to his nephew.”

The most interesting essays are written on topics that the writer cares about deeply, so choose something that fascinates you, something that you know about first-hand or are interested in researching further.

SLIDE 16

Putting It All Together, Step 2

The second step in thesis building is to form your opinion about your topic.

Clearly, the seeing-eye dog writer has a preference for the golden retriever breed. Clearly, the sleep deprivation writer feels that lack of sleep is hazardous to your health. And clearly, the Jefferson writer feels that Jefferson’s message can be great guidance for modern youths. These writers are all expressing opinions about their topics.

SLIDE 17

Putting It All Together, Step 3

Next, meld your topic and your opinion together into a claim. Here, we see the golden retriever fan and the sleep deprivation writer doing just that.

SLIDE 18

Putting It All Together, Step 4

Finally, add a plan statement in order to provide a road map of what’s to come for your readers. Here, we see our three examples once again with their plan statements highlighted.
Your plan statement may change during the drafting and revising of your essay. For instance, you may decide that one point just doesn’t work, and you replace it with another point that works better. Simply revise your plan statement to reflect the new information and order of your ideas as you revise.

SLIDE 19

Where to Place Your Thesis

At this point, you may be thinking, “This is all great, but where am I supposed to put this important sentence?

Actually, there are a few methods that advanced writers have at their disposal. One writer may state the thesis at the end of the introductory paragraph, while another writer may clarify the thesis after two or three paragraphs, while still another writer may imply the thesis rather than state it outright.

However, for beginning writers practicing structure and clarity, I always recommend the first option: placing the thesis statement at or near the end of the introductory paragraph. Doing so clarifies your focus and your direction before your readers head down the road of your essay. Readers will usually appreciate your clarity of expression when you place your thesis here.

Pause to study the sample introduction on this slide. … Notice how the writer hooks her readers with an intriguing question. The writer narrows down to an overview of the topic. Finally, once readers are hooked and understand the topic better, the writer provides her claim about the topic at the end of the introductory paragraph. This is an example of a well-placed thesis.

SLIDE 20

To summarize this lesson, including a thesis statement in your essay provides direction for your readers, creates a clear message in your essay, and clarifies your point of view.

In order to check your thesis statement for the three essential elements, you can apply the simple thesis formula at any step in the writing process.

Your Topic + Your Opinion + Your Plan Statement = THESIS

I am glad you’ve made it to the end of this lesson and hope that you have found it useful! I encourage you to refer back to these ideas as you continue to compose your academic essays.