

ENGL 100 Writing Seminar 1



Zoom Meeting Information

- Zoom Meetings are about 60 minutes in length.
- Zoom Meetings are recorded.
- Recordings and PowerPoint presentations are posted on onQ (under “Activities” > “Zoom Meetings”).
- Participate in the discussion by using the “Chat” window or by raising your hand in “Reactions.”
- Your camera may be on or off.

ENGL 100 Zoom Meetings

	Writing Seminars	Essay Debriefs	Live Chats
Weeks 1-3	Writing Seminar 1 (Thesis Statements)		Live Chat 1 (Short Fiction)
Weeks 4-6	Writing Seminar 2 (Essay Structure)	Essay 1 Debrief (Thesis Statements)	Live Chat 2 (Drama)
Weeks 7-9	Writing Seminar 3 (Grammar and Style)	Essay 2 Debrief (Essay Structure)	Live Chat 3 (Literary Non-Fiction)
Weeks 10-12	Writing Seminar 4 (MLA and Plagiarism)	Essay 3 Debrief (Grammar and Style)	Live Chat 4 (Poetry)

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

- 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

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Thesis Statement

Topics	Thesis Statements	
discursive or descriptive	argumentative or debatable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a single sentence that clearly and concisely indicates the central argument of the essay not the same thing as a topic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
broad and general	narrow and concise	
answer the question "What?"	answer the questions "Why?" and/or "How?"	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a single sentence that clearly and concisely indicates the central argument of the essay not the same thing as a topic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> must be argumentative must take a clear position on some significant issue must answer the questions "Why?" and/or "How?", and not just "What?"
specific	supportable	
should consider as narrow an issue as possible, not a generalized issue	should be defensible through evidence from the text(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> characterized by all four of "the Four S's": significant, single, specific, and supportable

Thesis Tests

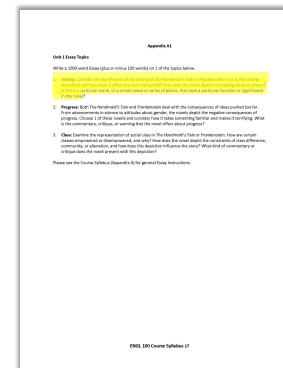
The "So What?" Test

- 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 issue in the literary text.

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.

Sample Essay Topic



Setting: Consider the significance of the setting of *The Handmaid's Tale*. How is the setting described, and how does it affect the story being told? How does the novel depict contrasting times or places? Is there a particular scene, or a certain place or series of places, that have a particular function or significance in the novel?

Draft Thesis 1

X How does Atwood use setting in *The Handmaid's Tale*?

- **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

X This essay will examine how Atwood uses setting in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

- **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 statement 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

X Setting is a significant element in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

- **Apply the "So What?" Test:** setting does appear to be a significant element in the novel, but what theme does this significance point to?
- **Apply the Counterargument Test:** to suggest that setting is an insignificant element is invalid, as setting clearly plays an important role in the novel
- **Conclusion:** Draft thesis 3 is vague and observational rather than concise and argumentative

Draft Thesis 4

X Atwood uses familiar settings in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

- **Apply the "So What?" Test:** Atwood does use familiar settings in the novel, but why is it significant or revealing that she uses them?
- **Apply the Counterargument Test:** to suggest that Atwood uses unfamiliar settings is invalid because it is patently obvious that she uses familiar settings throughout the novel
- **Conclusion:** Draft thesis 4 is insufficiently concise and argumentative

weakest strongest

1 2 3 4 5 6

Draft Thesis 5

✗ Atwood uses familiar settings in *The Handmaid's Tale* to make a powerful statement about repressive political regimes in the modern western world.

- **Apply the “So What?” Test:** Atwood does use familiar settings in the novel to make a statement, but what, exactly, is that statement?
- **Apply the Counterargument Test:** to suggest that Atwood uses setting to make a weak statement 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”

weakest strongest

1 2 3 4 5 6

Draft Thesis 6

✓ Atwood uses familiar, domestic settings in *The Handmaid's Tale* to suggest that the institution of a repressive political regime is a real possibility in the modern western world, rather than the stuff of science fiction.

- **Apply the “So What?” Test:** passes test because it advances a concrete reason why Atwood uses familiar settings
- **Apply the Counterargument Test:** passes test because another critic could potentially advance a different, equally valid reason for why Atwood uses familiar settings
- **Conclusion:** Draft thesis 6 is a strong thesis because it is concise and argumentative

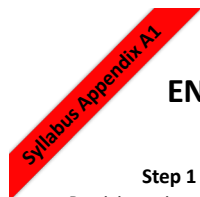
For More Information

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

- Essay Writing Notes

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 About Fiction



ENGL 100 Writing Assignment 1

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|--|--|---|
| <p>Step 1</p> <p>Participate in or review the recording of Writing Seminar 1 on onQ.</p> | <p>Step 2</p> <p>Compose a draft thesis statement that responds to the topic in Appendix A1 of the Course Syllabus.</p> | <p>Step 3</p> <p>Refine your draft thesis statement to a final version using the techniques in Writing Assignment 1.</p> |
| <p>Step 4</p> <p>Submit the following three elements in one (and only one) document on onQ:</p> | | |
| <p>1. Thesis Statement (1 sentence)</p> | <p>2. “So What?” Test Paragraph (100 words)</p> | <p>3. Counterargument Test Paragraph (100 words)</p> |

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