Modern European History

Essay Writing

**Introduction**

Writing often takes the form of persuasion - convincing others that you have an interesting, logical point of view on a particular subject. Persuasion is a skill you practice regularly in your daily life: you persuade your siblings to help you clean the house, your parents to let you borrow the car, or your friend to watch a specific movie, etc. Specific assignments often ask you to make a persuasive case in writing – that is, you are asked to convince your reader of your point of view. This form of persuasion follows a predictable pattern in writing: you briefly introduce your topic and then state your point of view. This statement is your **thesis** - it serves as the guiding point for everything else you’ll be saying in your essay.

**What Is A Thesis Statement?**

A thesis statement:

tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.

is a road map for the essay; it tells the reader what to expect in the rest of the essay.

directly answers the question asked; a thesis is an *interpretation* of a subject, not the subject itself.

*e.g.: the subject of an essay might be the reign of Elizabeth I; a thesis offers a specific interpretation of the reign of Elizabeth I*

is a statement that someone could disagree with.

is located in your introduction and presents your overall argument to the reader.

**How Do I Create A Thesis?**

Suppose you are asked to write an essay to answer the following question:

*“Who is the most important person we have studied so far in Modern European history?”*

When creating your thesis, ask yourself the following:

Does my thesis actually answer the question as asked?

You should be able to reconstruct the essay prompt from your answer; if not, you may have missed the focus of the question.

Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?

If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it’s possible that you are simply providing information, not making an argument.

*“Elizabeth I ruled England from 1558 to 1603”* is a fact, not an argument.

(And it doesn’t answer the prompt.)

*“Elizabeth I is the most important person we have studied so far in Modern European history”* is an argument you can prove.

Does my thesis statement make the reader ask *why*?

If not, it’s not an argument.

Is this the *right* answer?

Keep in mind you are presenting one of *many* possible answers to the question – it’s not the one and only right answer – and there usually isn’t only one right answer; there are only strong and weak thesis statements and strong and weak uses of evidence.

Although a basic thesis statement directly answers the question as asked and as such, is a complete and valid thesis statement, if this was the only sentence in the introduction the reader would think, “But - *why*?” A **thoroughly developed thesis** is part of an introductory paragraph that includes additional lead-in information about the general subject matter to make the reader *want* to read your essay; it mentions your main reasons and includes some of the specific details that will be in your essay.

**Process Example**

Your thesis statement should beg the question *“Why?”* Your answers will help you form your arguments. Group your answers into categories as much as possible, then give each category a broad description. Choose the three categories you believe to be the best; you now have a basic thesis with three arguments, each with details. These arguments and details are what will prove your thesis.

Imagine your thesis statement is this:

*“Elizabeth I is the most important person we have studied so far in Modern European history.”*

Write possible information to use in your essay here:

Group the facts into three categories, each with a heading:

I.

II.

III.

Now you can write your basic thesis statement:

I. Thesis: