

## CHECKLIST FOR THESES AS ENTHYMEMES

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Some of the best theses are enthymemes, a type of sentence in which one clause presents a clear argument and another clause presents a reason supporting that argument. Does your thesis do all the following? If you cannot answer "yes" to all of these questions, then your thesis is not really an enthymeme.

- (1) Is it a single sentence?
- (2) Does that single sentence contain . . .
  - A. a clause that presents your own original argument (rather than somebody else's)--a thesis and
  - B. a clause that presents a reason to support your argument,
  - C. connected together by a word like *because*, *since*, *so*, or some other subordinate conjunction that establishes a logical relationship between the two statements?
- (3) Does the clause that presents a reason use a *shared assumption*--a statement with which even a hostile audience might agree? Does it use that shared assumption as a logical bridge to lead the audience toward the more controversial part of the argument?
- (4) Is the clause that presents your argument one that answers a question at issue? In other words, is there anyone in the class who disagrees and takes the opposite stance?
- (5) Is it precise? Does it avoid vague terms that sound good and mean nothing? Does it create an argument the right "size" for the assignment's length?

The following are not good enthymemes:

***Reading is a valuable asset because it is useful to be able to read.***

Who would argue that reading is not valuable? This point is not a question at issue, so it doesn't meet the fourth requirement. Additionally, the writer is also using "circular reasoning," in that the author is trying to use to prove her thesis by restating it in different words.

***This paper will be about children's welfare in America in the twenty-first century.***

Who would disagree with this statement? Of course the paper is about that topic! The author is not presenting an argument, so the thesis fails the second and fourth requirements.

***The president believes he is right to intercede in Iraq.***

Okay, so that's what President Bush believes. What do you believe? You are only "explaining" somebody else's position, but you are not making your own argument. This does not satisfy part A of the second requirement.

***Studies show 82% of college students at public schools drink alcohol.***

This statement presents a statistic, not an argument. What course of action do you advocate? What is the shared assumption? Where is the second clause?

***In the area of mental processes, I think women are more intelligent than men.***

What does "mental processes" mean? The phrase may sound neat, but it's actually vague. It doesn't meet the fifth requirement. Additionally, there is no clause giving a reason.

***All mothers have a maternal instinct to protect their children.***

So judges should favor women in child custody cases? So adoption is not as desirable as leaving children with their natural parents? The reader isn't sure where the author is headed because there isn't a second clause. Beware also of sweeping statements like "all."

***I hated The Terminator, so I will probably hate T3 when I watch it.***

Where is the shared assumption? Does this answer a question at issue for the audience? Does it even matter?