

Checklist for Enthymemes

Does your enthymeme do all the following? If you cannot answer "yes" to all of these questions, *then your thesis is not really a good enthymeme.*

- ✓ (1) Can you state it in a single sentence?
- ✓ (2) Does that single sentence contain:
 - A. a clause that presents your original argument (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?
- ✓ (3) Does the clause that presents a reason use a *shared assumption*--a statement even a hostile audience might agree with?
- ✓ (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?

For instance, consider this enthymeme: "The EPA should limit the use of irrigation because the water levels are diminishing in American aquifers." It meets an enthymeme's requirements. If you divide it into parts, it looks like the following:

The EPA should limit the use of irrigation **because** *the water levels are diminishing in American aquifers.*
(clause providing a thesis) (subordinate conjunction) (clause presenting a reason)

The first clause presents an argument, the focus of the paper. The subordinating conjunction connects the argument to the second clause, which presents a supporting reason. Of course, in the student's paper, the student will have to deal with concerns such as the effect limited irrigation will have on agricultural industries, food supplies, and the rights of the farmers who own the land, but her primary argument will deal with the depletion of aquifers.

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 statement probably 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 prove her thesis by restating it in different words.
- *This paper will be about aircraft in the Iraq War.*
 - 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.
- *Barrack Obama believes he is right to raise taxes so he can fund healthcare.*
 - Okay, so that's what Obama 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 23% of college students catch a venereal disease before graduating.*
 - This is 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 familial processes, I think women are more intelligent than men.*
 - What does "familial processes" mean? The phrase may sound neat, but does it mean anything? The enthymeme doesn't meet the fifth requirement.
- *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.
- *Since I hated The Green Lantern, I will probably hate Batman: The Dark Knight Rises.*
 - Where is the shared assumption? Does this answer a question at issue for the audience?