

THESIS AS ENTHYMEME

ENTHYMEME: The relationship between reason and conclusion.

The thesis I have been asking you to write is an enthymeme, because it asks you to make a clear connection between your assertion (claim) and the reasons you use to support that assertion.

The pattern can be developed in two ways.

Idea 1 (Argument's Conclusion)	because	Idea 2 (Supporting Reason)
	OR	
Idea 1 (Supporting Reason)	since	Idea 2 (Argument's Conclusion)

You can argue deductively, from the general to the specific:

1. "Grades should be abolished because the purpose of education is to teach people, not to judge them."
2. "War would be less likely if women outnumbered men in the Senate because recent psychological studies show women are able to compromise more readily than men."

You can argue inductively, from the specific to the general:

1. Grades do not accurately assess what students have learned because test scores reveal only a small part of the knowledge a student may have.
2. More women need to be elected to the Senate because 95 per cent of women in state legislatures voted to increase funding for breast cancer research.

Toulmin Model of Argument

Claim: The idea being argued.

Data: The facts we appeal to as the foundation for the claim.

Warrants: The general, hypothetical (and often implicit) statements that serve as bridges between claim and data.

Qualifiers: Statements that limit the strength of the argument or that propose conditions in which it applies.

Rebuttals: Statements that indicate the circumstances in which the argument might have to be set aside.

Backing: Statements that serve to support warrants.

The terms *claim*, *data*, and *warrant*, are very close in meaning to the terms connected to enthymeme of *conclusion*, *reason*, and *assumption*.

Testing a Thesis

1. Is it an *idea*? Does it state, in a complete sentence, an assertion it will set out to prove?
2. Does it answer a question that is really *at issue* or under debate for the audience? What kind of a question is it? (A good rule of thumb—if you read your statement before the class and every single student agrees with your argument, you aren't really focusing on anything debatable or worth arguing. Throw out that thesis and start again.)
3. Does the thesis say exactly what I mean? Are the terms I use precise and clear, or am I giving into the temptation to use big words that sound neat, but mean very little?

4. Has the thesis developed out of a process of reasoning? Have I considered each side of the issue adequately?
5. Can a writer develop the argument reasonably given the length of the assignment? A thesis that states, "Throughout history, mankind has found war inevitable because...." would theoretically cover every single war in every country in every century for the past several thousand years--material for hundreds of books. On the other hand, the thesis that, "Students' socks stink because mildew grows in the dormitory laundry room" probably isn't suitable for a three-page paper, much less a ten-page one.