



The Lantern English Co.
The Advanced Writer

The Persuasive Essay I – Syllabus

Course Description: In this class, students will focus on learning how to write the persuasive essay. Persuasive thesis development will be at the forefront of this class, as students learn to persuade, use evidence well, and respond to the counter argument while utilizing research & citation skills. Students will use their growing knowledge and skills to write three persuasive essays, all of which allow for complete rough drafts and revisions.

Course Outline:

Week One: The Persuasive Thesis

Week Two: Review of Sources and Citations – Submit Thesis & Source List

Week Three: The Persuasive Essay – Submit Rough Draft

Week Four: More About the Counter Claim – Submit Final Essay

Week Five: Improving Analysis & Interpretation of Evidence – Submit Rough Draft

Week Six: Improving Analysis & Interpretation of Evidence – Submit Final Essay

Week Seven: Reviewing the Persuasive Structure – Submit Rough Draft

Week Eight: Reviewing the Persuasive Structure – Submit Final Essay



The Persuasive Essay I – Grading Information

Rough draft assignments (Week 3, 5, and 7) will be graded using the rough draft rubric shown below. Assignments 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 will be graded using our standard grading rubric for *The Advanced Writer*. All assignments will be averaged to receive a final course grade.

Rough Draft Rubric –

Exemplary 100%	Strong 99%-90%	Proficient 89%-80%	Developing 79%-70%	Emerging 69%-60%	Beginning 59%-50%	No Attempt 49% and below
Student has followed all assignment directions and has demonstrated exemplary understanding of lesson concepts. For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a complete assignment and demonstrated excellent effort.	Student has followed most assignment directions and has demonstrated strong understanding of lesson concepts. For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a mostly complete assignment and demonstrated strong effort.	Student has followed most assignment directions but has struggled to fully understand lesson concepts. For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted a mostly complete assignment and demonstrated proficient effort.	Student has followed some or most assignment directions but has demonstrated a need for better understanding of lesson concepts. For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted mediocre written work and demonstrated some lack of effort.	Student has followed some assignment directions but has demonstrated inadequate understanding of lesson concepts. For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted inadequate written work so that the instructor finds it difficult to provide helpful feedback.	Student has followed few assignment directions and has demonstrated poor understanding of lesson concepts. For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted short and poorly written work so that the instructor is unable to provide helpful feedback.	Student has followed few to no assignment directions and has demonstrated no understanding of lesson concepts. For drafts of outline, bibliography, and paper, student has submitted nothing.



The Persuasive Essay I

Lesson One: The Persuasive Thesis

SAMPLE LESSON

As we began *The Expository Essay*, we will begin this class by discussing the thesis statement. In much of the writing world and even the academic sphere, there is discrepancy between what a thesis is and is not. Many experts or professors suggest that every essay must contain a thesis, whether that thesis is expository or persuasive. On the other hand, many different experts or professors suggest that all thesis statements are persuasive because thesis statements must be debatable. In this case, they suggest that expository essays use topic sentences, not thesis statements.

However, a perusal of websites for various university writing centers, essay-writing handouts, and even writing handbooks will demonstrate that the opinions on defining thesis statements are inconsistent. We think it is important that you are aware of this as we move forward, because an understanding of thesis development is crucial to success in writing.

For the purpose of our classes, we teach two different thesis structures: **expository** and **persuasive**. *Although both can make a claim, these two types of thesis statements make different kinds of claims.*

This distinction feels easy when you are writing about simple topics, such as “There are four seasons each year” or “Although cats and dogs are both common household pets, they are very different in personality and needs.” Obviously, these topics are expository because they are factual and would not produce much or any argument.

On the other hand, saying something like, “Summer is much better than winter,” or “Everyone should have a cat,” is much more clearly persuasive. These statements are not factual, but based on opinion and the idea that everyone else should come to the same conclusion as you have.

However, when you get into more complex subjects, such as what we learned about in *The Expository Essay* and what we will use in this class, the distinction between the two types of thesis statements blurs.

In the future, you may be called upon to write essays with thesis statements such as you have learned about in *The Expository Essay*. However, the assignments may not be worded in a way that suggests that these essays are expository. The assignment may say something such as, “Choose a complex topic, develop a debatable thesis and write . . .”; if you read this, you might be tempted to think that you are about to write a persuasive essay, but that may not be the case. The essay may be about a complex topic which others might disagree with, but the structure of the essay may not actually be persuasive in style. Again, this is where the lines get blurred.

In all writing situations, it is really important to understand the assignment(s) and what the instructor is asking or looking for. If you are at all unsure, it is wise to contact the instructor and even submit a thesis statement ahead of your writing to make sure it is along the lines of what is acceptable.

Whether or not an assignment is clearly expository or persuasive or somewhere blurred in the middle, you can use the skills you learn in this class and in *The Expository Essay* to help you construct strong thesis statements and strong essays in any situation. The concepts for both types of theses are really the same, across the board; the confusion lies more or less in the definitions.

Let's consider an example. Here is the thesis for the example on week 4 of *The Expository Essay*.

“While many people find cooking to be a stressful and challenging task, the art of preparation, or *mise en place* as the French refer to it, can lead nearly any struggling cook to success.”

We consider this to be **expository**, because it sets up an essay which will *explain* what *mise en place* (pronounce: me-zon-plos) is and how it aids the cooking process. It certainly makes a claim, that *mise en place* “can lead nearly any struggling cook to success.” However, the essay focuses on explaining *mise en place* and how it can help cooks achieve success.

On the other hand, consider if we rewrite the thesis.

“Because of its ability to transform and bring success to the cooking process, the concept of *mise en place* should be the first taught in any culinary setting, whether classes are for children, adults, or students pursuing a degree.”

This essay might also explain the concept of *mise en place*, but focuses instead on proving why *mise en place* should or must be taught to all culinary learners at the start, not as an elusive concept for culinary students or French people.

So, although both statements make a claim, and for many experts or professors, both statements *could* be considered persuasive, the two statements are still different. One statement focuses on explaining the facts, while the other statement focuses on arguing the case that this idea should be mandatory lesson material.

Persuasive statements take a stand formulated out of belief or opinion, and often make claims about something being better or best. Persuasive statements might also use words like *should*, *ought*, *must*, & *need to*.

Consider again the list of example thesis statements we provided in *The Expository Essay*.

Expository Thesis Statements:

- Students can become more effective writers by employing three strategies.
- Wolves are often pictured in fairy tales as ferocious animals, but they are very social and unique animals who do not deserve their scary reputation.
- George Washington was an excellent leader—a man of courage, perseverance, and desire to help our country succeed.
- The rewarding process of photographing a lunar eclipse requires careful preparation and sound equipment.

Persuasive Thesis Statements:

- Although many of us love taking hot showers, taking cold showers is actually the better choice because of the countless health benefits associated with cool temperatures.
- A longer school day does not guarantee that students will be productive in classes, reminding us that young people must find learning meaningful.
- Free public transportation should be implemented as a key step in reducing unemployment rates.
- Our family should get a dog because of the opportunity it will provide us children for learning responsibility.

Again, both sets of statements make claims. People could disagree with both sets of statements. But, from our perspective, the statements are not the same, and they are not all persuasive by nature. The top four focus on using facts to explain the theses. The bottom four statements make opinion-based claims that will need to be proven and discussed against counter claims. Notice also how the first persuasive thesis statement suggests that one character is the most important, and how the other three use the terms *must* & *should*.

Remember, the expository thesis presents the subject to the reader, without providing an argument or opinion. **Your expository thesis should focus on informing, explaining, describing, or defining. The expository essay should focus on laying out the facts, without telling the reader what he or she should do with those facts.**

On the other hand, the persuasive thesis **presents an opinion about the subject to the reader, contrasting it with other opinions, arguments, or viewpoints. The persuasive essay focuses on laying out facts and evidence to prove a point while telling the reader what he or she should do with those facts.** The main goal of a persuasive essay is to present enough logical evidence to help the reader come to the same conclusion as the writer.

For the purpose of this class, we will be looking for persuasive thesis statements that follow these examples. Your persuasive thesis statements should suggest that something is better/best/most important or use words like *should, ought, must, & need to*.

If you want to challenge yourself, you can also branch out from *should, ought, must, & need to* and use different words to create phrases in your thesis statement such as:

- “. . . is a necessity.”
- “. . . is imperative.”
- “. . . is necessary.”
- “. . . is an obligation.”
- “. . . is required.”
- “. . . is necessitated.”

HOW TO CREATE A PERSUASIVE THESIS –

1. **Identify the topic.**
2. **Make a statement of perspective.** Remember, a persuasive thesis is built upon your opinion or perspective about a subject. “Dogs are better pets than cats because they are more social, providing much needed emotional support to owners, and more useful, providing help for many life situations” = perspective. With this statement, I am claiming that dogs are better pets than cats, which is persuasive, not expository. With this statement, I am challenging the reader to see my reasoning and evidence as proof to have a pet dog rather than a pet cat. Remember, the main goal of a persuasive thesis, and therefore the essay, is to present enough logical evidence to help the reader come to the same conclusion as the writer.
3. **If useful, qualify the topic.** For both expository and persuasive thesis statements, a common and simple qualifying word is *because*. “Dogs are better pets than cats *because* they are more loyal, more social, and more useful.”
4. **Write just a sentence, not a paragraph.** A lot of students get confused with this one. A thesis is not a group of sentences, not a paragraph, and not the complete introduction. A thesis should be one sentence, two ONLY if absolutely necessary.

STRONG VS. WEAK –

In *The Expository Essay*, we covered a number of thesis errors, in order to understand what makes a strong thesis rather than a weak thesis. We are including those as an attachment with this lesson, if you would like to review them. But for this portion of the lesson, we want to discuss some additional, specific concepts which will help make your persuasive thesis statements stronger.

- **A persuasive thesis takes a perspective** – a strong persuasive thesis is not merely an observation, such as “There are advantages and disadvantages to using statistics.” Instead, the persuasive thesis statement takes a perspective on the subject, by saying something like, “In order to ensure accurate reporting, journalists must understand the real significance of the statistics they report.”
- **A persuasive thesis is assertive** – a strong persuasive thesis should demonstrate to the reader that you are, in fact, taking a perspective on an issue and arguing for something. Own your

perspective. In addition, phrases such as “I think that” or “It’s my opinion that” should not be used. These are redundant and show your need to qualify or defend your position, which weaken the thesis. Let the evidence defend your perspective, but let the thesis be assertive.

WEAK: “Citizens should take more responsibility in solving the problems of their communities and the nation, but I could be wrong about this.”

STRONG: “Citizens should take more responsibility in solving the problems of their communities and the nation.”

WEAK: “It’s my opinion that companies should use Facebook pages for both advertising and customer support.”

STRONG: “Because the Internet is filled with an abundance of marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using Facebook pages that offer both advertising and customer support.”

- **A persuasive thesis must be contestable** – You can develop an assertive perspective about an incontestable subject. For example, consider this statement: “Because of the many health benefits, everyone should exercise.” This is a perspective and it’s fairly assertive, but most average people would agree with this statement. What is the point of writing a paper about something everyone already knows about or agrees with?
- **A persuasive thesis inspires rather than quiets** – Although a strong persuasive thesis should take a perspective and be assertive, it should not be rude. A thesis statement should never be emotionally-driven. In essence, a thesis statement should never give the impression that you are shouting at or dismissing all opposing views. i.e. “Dogs are better pets than cats, because I said so, and anyone who thinks otherwise is just dumb.” While your perspective should be clear and assertive, it should also inspire the audience to consider your view based on quality evidence and in fair comparison to other opinions. A strong persuasive thesis should inspire conversation or new ways of thinking about a topic, for which there are multiple views.
- **A persuasive thesis should be provable** – We certainly hold opinions on many subjects, but those opinions may not have enough evidence to support them. For example, while it may be someone’s perspective that listening to rock music is bad, this perspective is too broad and based too much on personal opinion. There is absolutely no way to prove that music with a beat or a

certain tempo is inherently “bad.” Besides, what does “bad” even mean? Strong support in the form of examples and evidence for these types of statement will not be easy to find. A strong persuasive thesis statement should neither be too personal in opinion nor too far-fetched that it is beyond the realm of proof.

- **A persuasive thesis should never be defended solely by one's religion or culture.**

Certainly, our worldview and opinions are often largely formed or impacted by our upbringing, our culture, and/or our faith. Never would we suggest that you should neglect these very important aspects of your life, as they can play a very important role in your ability to construct thesis statements and develop meaningful conversation with others. However, your upbringing, culture, or religious affiliation should never become the single support for your thesis. For example, you cannot construct an essay around the following perspective: “We should not lie, because the Bible tells us not to.” This may be true, but what about for readers who do not adhere to the Christian faith? If your perspective is that we should not lie, can you defend this with additional support that would engage even those who do not share the same upbringing, culture, or faith?

FINAL THOUGHTS –

As we did in *The Expository Essay*, we want to step back from the realm of academic essay writing and have a conversation. With the mention of essay writing or thesis development, many students would rather run the other direction. The whole process seems too complicated and rather pointless sometimes. But, do you understand the power of words, the power of your ideas? When you write something, you have the potential to communicate important things and impact other people.

Although essays are a large part of education, our hope is that your main takeaway from this class would not be that you need to learn to write expository essays so that you can get good grades or go to college. Instead, we hope you can see the positive elements of being able to express yourself through writing in a way that communicates logically with others. The ability to communicate your thoughts clearly, logically, and respectfully is something that will help you in many areas of life, far beyond and outside of your education.

So, yes – we will be using stuffy academic words like *thesis*, *sources*, and *citations*. But, please try to see the big picture. If you can look at these concepts and assignments as an opportunity to expand your skill in meaningful communication about what matters to you, the work may come more easily.

Back to the thesis then—The thesis is not some lofty, elusive statement. Instead, it is a single sentence that provides your essay with a focused, central idea. While the thesis should be interesting, it does not need to be complicated. A thesis is made interesting when you have truly thought about a topic or already find the topic interesting. **The purpose of the thesis is to be able to articulate your thoughts in a single, controlling idea—the main idea upon which you develop your essay.**

Regardless of the topic for an assignment, ask yourself, “What do I want to say about this topic?” Don't think about what you *should* say about the topic or what everyone else is saying about the topic. Writing should never merely be about completing an assignment, getting a good grade, or impressing an instructor. Writing should be a form in which you can communicate your ideas about a topic in a logical, meaningful, and respectful way—in a way that opens dialogue between you and your audience, in a way that adds to cultural conversation, rather than just becoming another bit of 'noise' among the noise of everyone else.

CLASS NOTES –

We will not be assigning topics for this class. Students naturally write better about topics that interest them. Of course, you will not always be able to write about topics of your choice, but for the purpose of *learning* how to craft meaningful and convincing essays, we find it can be helpful for students to demonstrate their own ideas and personalities rather than having to respond to assigned topics.

However, for the purpose of this class, there are some topics that are off limits. Please do not submit thesis statements or papers discussing the following topics:

- texting while driving
- obesity
- gun control
- overuse of technology
- current military conflicts
- issues of morality
- politics

There is certainly nothing wrong with discussing these topics. Yet, we find that these topics are overused (perhaps because they are such talking points in our current culture!) and do not enable the student to easily express original ideas. There are better times and places to discuss these things, but in your writing for this class, we want to see your interests come alive.

Assignment 1: Submit a list of **ten** original topics and corresponding **persuasive** thesis statements. Remember that each thesis statement should present a clear, strong **central idea** that focuses on the foundations of persuasive writing: perspective-driven, assertive, contestable, and inspiring. **Your persuasive thesis statements should suggest that something is better/best/most important or use words/phrases like *should, ought, must, & need to*.**

One of these statements will be chosen for your first essay (Lessons 2-4), based on initial instructor feedback. In addition, you can use the feedback from this first assignment to help you develop the thesis statements necessary for the other two essays you will write in this course.

Example:

- Topic: History
- Thesis Statement: History is the most essential subject a student can learn in order to understand the world around them.