

## SUGGESTIONS ON WRITTEN WORK

All of the written assignments for this course are expected to be in conventional university-level essay format. This format includes a number of elements: a thesis statement outlining the central argument, a clear organizational framework including introduction and conclusion, and proper referencing of citations. (Students should purchase a copy of *Essays and Reports: A Handbook* available in the UW Bookstore.) If students need help with formulating a thesis statement or constructing an overall organizational structure, they should consult this handbook!!

## THESIS STATEMENT/ORGANIZATION

A central element in a paper's organization is the thesis statement which usually appears at the end of the introductory paragraph. The thesis statement outlines the *central* argument as well as the ground the paper will cover in establishing this argument so that the reader can assess the logic of the argument and the evidence supporting it as the paper proceeds. (The reader shouldn't need to wait for the last page to find out that "the butler did it.") Thus, the thesis statement *must* not simply state the topic area but also the substance of the paper's central argument.

The following example is based on a hypothetical assignment which asks students to consider the implication of a particular bureaucratic reform, how it fits with Canadian bureaucratic conventions and its implications for democracy.

### Topic Statement (=unacceptable!)

This paper will examine the proposed changes to the Indian Act embodied in the 1969 White Paper.

This paper will examine the proposed changes to the Indian Act embodied in the 1969 and how they fit with the dominant political culture.

- *Both of these topic sentences fail to outline what argument the author will make and neglect to indicate what ground will be covered by the paper in the course of making this argument.*

### Weak Thesis Statement

This paper argues that the 1969 White Paper fit with an emerging emphasis in Canadian political culture on individualism and individual rights which was in tension with First Nations' focus on the importance of community..

- *Outlines the argument but begs the question of the basis for this conclusion and the ground the paper will cover in making the argument.*

## **Thesis Statement (i.e. what the instructor wants to see!!)**

The assimilationist thrust of the 1969 White Paper which focused on defining natives as individuals was clearly in tension with First Nations' conceptions emphasizing the importance of community. Aboriginal resistance to the White Paper shifted the debate in Canada away from explicitly assimilationist government policies.

- *Outlines both the argument and final conclusions the author will draw as well as the ground the paper will cover.*

## **STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION**

While a strong thesis statement is central in creating a coherent, logically flowing structure, the author needs to make sure that each new element or sub-point (usually each new paragraph in a short paper) is linked clearly back to the central argument outlined in the thesis statement. Each paragraph requires a strong topic sentence -- the reader should not have to guess what idea the paragraph is presenting. In order to make sure there is overall coherence to paper, you should also make sure that the topic sentence of each paragraph clearly relates the central idea in the paragraph back to the central argument of the thesis statement. (Again, the reader should not have to make the link.) One way to check whether this has been achieved is to read *only* the thesis statement and the topic sentence of each paragraph in the rest of the paper. These elements should flow together smoothly, follow each other logically, be clearly linked to each other, and present a good bare bones overview of the thrust of the paper.

Finally, the conclusion should restate the central argument of the paper in a single concluding statement. In restating the argument, the conclusion should not introduce any new elements that were not discussed earlier on in the paper. Only after the argument of the paper is clearly restated should the conclusion move on to placing the argument in a broader context -- for example, identifying other issues raised by the argument or the broader implications of the conclusion of the paper.