



## Writing Tips for Transfer Students

**Create a Thesis with an Arguable Claim** -- Your thesis should develop an arguable claim -- ideas that others, looking at the same evidence, might disagree with -- based on thorough interpretations of the relevant evidence. One effective way to ensure that your thesis is arguable is to address the counterargument briefly in your essay.

- Two Strategies for Creating an Arguable Claim:
  - **“How, what, and so what or why” thesis.** To do this, 1) explore “how” a text, film or expert’s theory makes its point (“how”); 2) stake out a debatable claim about a text, film or expert’s theory (“what”); and 3) the significance of your analysis of the film, text or expert’s theory to the audience or the themes you have been exploring in the class (“so what”) OR the reasons that your debatable claim is reasonable or significant (“why”).
    - *EXAMPLE: By telling the story through the eyes of an innocent child, the author exposes the conflict between nature and human greed. This serves to reveal the choice that modern humans must make between protecting nature and continuing human development.*
  - **“Although ....., my debatable claim” thesis.** Use a concessive clause, starting with words such as *although*, *whereas*, *while* to make your point stand out by contrasting it with an opposing position or with common views about the issue. Then introduce your debatable claim in the main part of the sentence.
    - *EXAMPLE: Although many people might assume that George Bailey gives up his dreams because he is weak-willed or lacks independence, it is actually Bailey’s location at the center of the town’s social network that tacitly pushes him to abandon his dreams.*

To find an arguable claim, answer the following questions about your topic/assignment:

- *What am I writing about? Why am I writing about this topic?*
- *What do I know about this topic and what do I still have to find out?*
- *What are my personal feelings on the matter?*
- *What effect do I want my writing to have on the reader?*
- *What is my reader’s understanding of the issue?*
- *What biases or objections should I take into account?*

**Move Away from the 5 Paragraph Essay Format** -- If you are used to relying on a 5-paragraph essay structure – 3 body paragraphs, an introduction and a conclusion -- this may not always serve you well in writing more sophisticated analytical papers. This structure might lead you to superficial interpretations

of the relevant evidence and a thesis that is not deep or complex. Here are some ways to move beyond that structure:

- Use a structure that matches the demands of the assignment.
  - Consider that there are different demands for assignments that require close reading, research, evaluation assignments, compare/contrast, analysis of causes/effects, or application of theory.
  - Use the prompt for guidance.
- Organize your paragraphs:
  - Group your main points together as makes sense, cut out ideas that don't seem as strong, and make sure that the final list of topics could form a logical argument to support your thesis
  - Let your thesis determine your organization – break the thesis into parts and plan how many paragraphs each “part” will require.

*EXAMPLE: Although many people might assume that George Bailey gives up his dreams because he is weak-willed or lacks independence//, it is actually Bailey's location at the center of the town's social network// that tacitly pushes him to abandon his dreams.*

- There are several potential purposes for a paragraph. See which of these fit and how many are necessary:
  - To define terms, to review the literature
  - To present evidence in favor of the thesis
  - To analyze the evidence
  - To accommodate and/or refute opposing views

**Add analysis and reflection to your sources** – You may be in the habit of **underusing** your sources, using them only to back up a point you are discussing or using only the number of sources you are required to by the instructor. However, using sources in your writing is not an end in itself. Ideally, using sources allows you to participate in an intellectual conversation about the topic. Here are some ways to get the most out of the sources you cite:

- never assume that your evidence can speak for itself—always add commentary to ensure that we know which parts of the evidence are most important and how it fits into your larger argument
- move back and forth between your own thinking and what sources have to say as a way of developing your ideas and analysis further in your paragraphs
- in addition to using sources that support your argument, introduce sources that you disagree with and respond to them