

Getting There: How to Organize an Effective (and Engaging) Essay

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Timeframe: 55 minutes

Target Audience: Students in any classes where they are expected to write papers

Materials needed: Paper, crayons, magazines, a computer and projector, and glue for making the maps. You can also hand out different kinds of maps at the beginning of class. The more variety, the better.

Objectives: After the lesson, students will be able to

- write an effective thesis statement.
- organize an essay using the thesis statement as a map.

Introduction to Lesson [5 minutes]:

Show the Powerpoint presentation and read the slide information from cards. Feel free to offer commentary. The slides illustrate the importance of having a map. “The thesis statement is the map. It guides you as you write your essay, helps bring focus to your research, and points the readers in the direction you want them to go.”

Getting There

How to Organize an Effective (and
Engaging) Essay Using a Thesis
Statement

Procedures [45 minutes]:

Step 1 [10 minutes]

How should a thesis statement function? Here are the requirements for an effective thesis statement.

- It states the topic.
- It creates interest. The topic has appeal for a population.
- It is specific enough to convey the focus of your essay, but general enough to cover all you will be discussing.
- It is manageable. You are able to cover the topic in the allotted number of pages.

While these are the rules for all thesis statements, remember that different types of papers require different thesis statements. A persuasive essay will include an opinion. A compare and contrast essay will need to connect two texts through similarities and differences.

Here are some examples. The instructor may project these examples, which is what I do, or he or she may want to hand out sheets with the samples on them.

Student Sample of a Persuasive Essay Thesis:

Technology is a valuable resource and should be used in classrooms because it teaches students skills that can be used in the workplace, there is a great deal of accessible information on the internet, and e-books are cheaper than regular books.

Student Sample of a Process Analysis Essay Thesis:

Cleaning a pool filter yourself is simple, can save you lot of money, and can be better for the environment.

Sample of a Compare and Contrast Essay Thesis:

While Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X both saw a desperate need for justice in America, they differed in the methods they thought would best achieve those goals, the degree to which whites should be part of the movements, and the religious philosophies underlying their approaches to injustice.

Once you have reviewed the examples, ask students the following questions. “Why are these thesis statements effective? Where is the topic stated? What subdivisions do you see that suggest topic sentences?”

Step 2 [10 minutes]

What information might we need to get where we want to go? An essay is a journey. The thesis statement is our map, but a map alone will not necessarily get us there. We need a plan. We need to know at which corner to turn, which landmarks to note, and we need to keep in mind where we are going. Transitions and evidence help provide that information for the reader. Side trips

are nice, but not for an essay. Let's try this exercise.

Here is an incomplete thesis statement. How might you complete this statement? We want three subdivisions.

Online universities are/are not a viable option to traditional universities because _____, _____, and _____.

This thesis statement is interesting, manageable, and specific. Non-traditional students and traditional students might consider the online university a viable alternative. The topic is of interest to those seeking a higher education. The topic is manageable. It is conceivable that a student could write such an essay in four pages. The thesis offers three specific ways in which online universities are a viable alternative to traditional universities.

Now, come up with a topic sentence for one subdivision. That sentence should refer back to the thesis statement. Be sure to use a transitional word or phrase so that the reader is guided into the paragraph. For example, if one of the subdivisions is "they are cheaper than traditional universities," a student might write as a first topic sentence, "Online universities are cheaper than traditional universities."

Discuss with the class what types of evidence might support the topic sentence. "What kind of evidence might we use to support our claim that online universities are less costly than traditional universities?" Write these ideas on the board. They might include data, observations, anecdotal evidence, and scholarly articles.

Fill in the blanks. Craft the topic sentences and write down evidence that might support your claims. All writing is a response to something. In this way, all writing is an argument and requires evidence.

Step 3 [10 minutes]

Here is a different kind of thesis statement. Fill in the blanks for this one.

The book that most changed my view of _____ was _____ because _____, _____, and _____.

After students have filled in the blanks discuss how they might support their claims about how the book changed their view. From what source will they draw this evidence? What kind of evidence would you use to support your ideas in this essay? How might this source differ from the sample thesis about online universities?

Step 4 [15 minutes]

Using the paper, crayons, and other supplies, have the students choose one thesis statement from those used in the exercises above. Have them write the thesis statement at top of the paper. They may also choose to write their own based on topics given by the instructor for the course they are taking. The body paragraphs are the stops where they pick up what they need to get to where they want to go.

There can be more than three stops. This is just a basic outline. For example, I am at home and want to prove that my claims are true. I draw a little house. Do not worry about being artistic.

Home: I want to prove that technology is invaluable in education. I will pack necessary supplies, go over the map with my team, and pack up the car. Next to the little house, write what you will gather there. Somewhere else on the map, draw another building. This will be the last building, your destination. Write your thesis statement there. These two structures frame your essay. The stops are your body paragraphs where you provide evidence or support for the claims you made in your thesis statement. You may draw any kind of structure you want. This is simply another way of making an outline. Sometimes drawing is a more effective way to get at your ideas. We can get stuck with words.

1st Stop—Pick up some stats on technology in the workplace.

2nd Stop—Talk about how I have used technology in doing my research papers.

3rd Stop—Visit the book shop to find out how e-book prices compare to traditional print books.

The next day students may share their maps with the class.

Closure/Evaluation [5 minutes]:

We have seen how a thesis statement can be an invaluable tool in organizing an essay. If we remember that we are taking the reader on a journey, we will remember to provide the travelers with all they need to complete that journey. Tomorrow we will share maps and begin talking about the frame of an essay, the introduction and conclusion.

Lesson Analysis:

Students understand the thesis as map idea quite well. The act of mapping will help them understand that an essay is a journey. Some parts of this exercise might take more time. If necessary, spread this activity out over two days. An additional exercise might include identifying thesis statements in their readings. I have not had them make physical maps yet, but I hope to try it this semester. This lesson can be adapted to any class that requires writing.

Getting There:

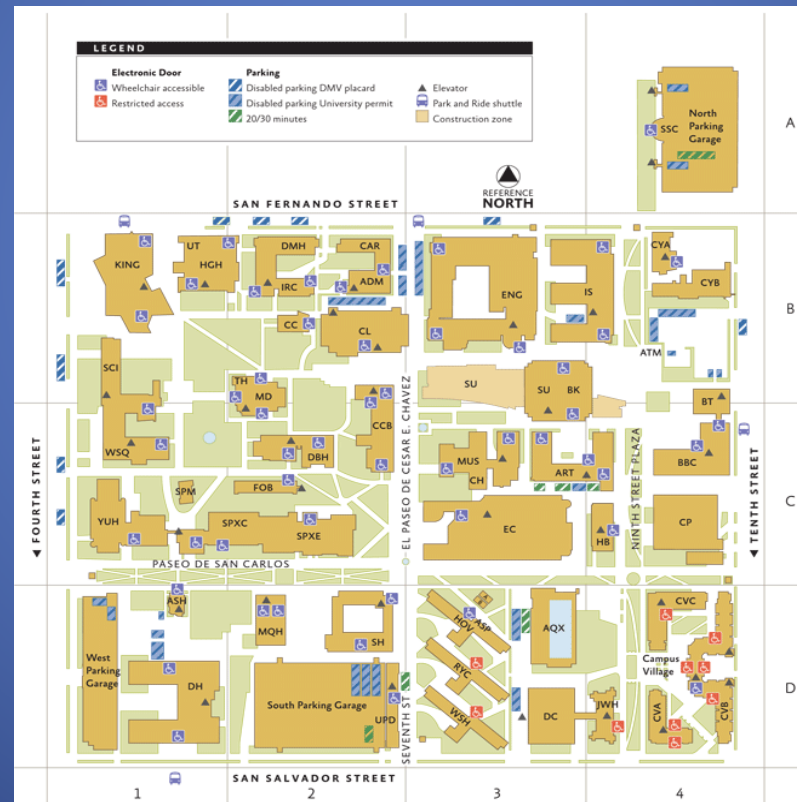
How to Organize an Effective (and Engaging) Essay Using a Thesis Statement

An Essay Is a Journey

The key is to let the readers know where they will be going through the ideas, words, tone, and even punctuation you use.

Maps Tell Us How to Get Where We Want to Go

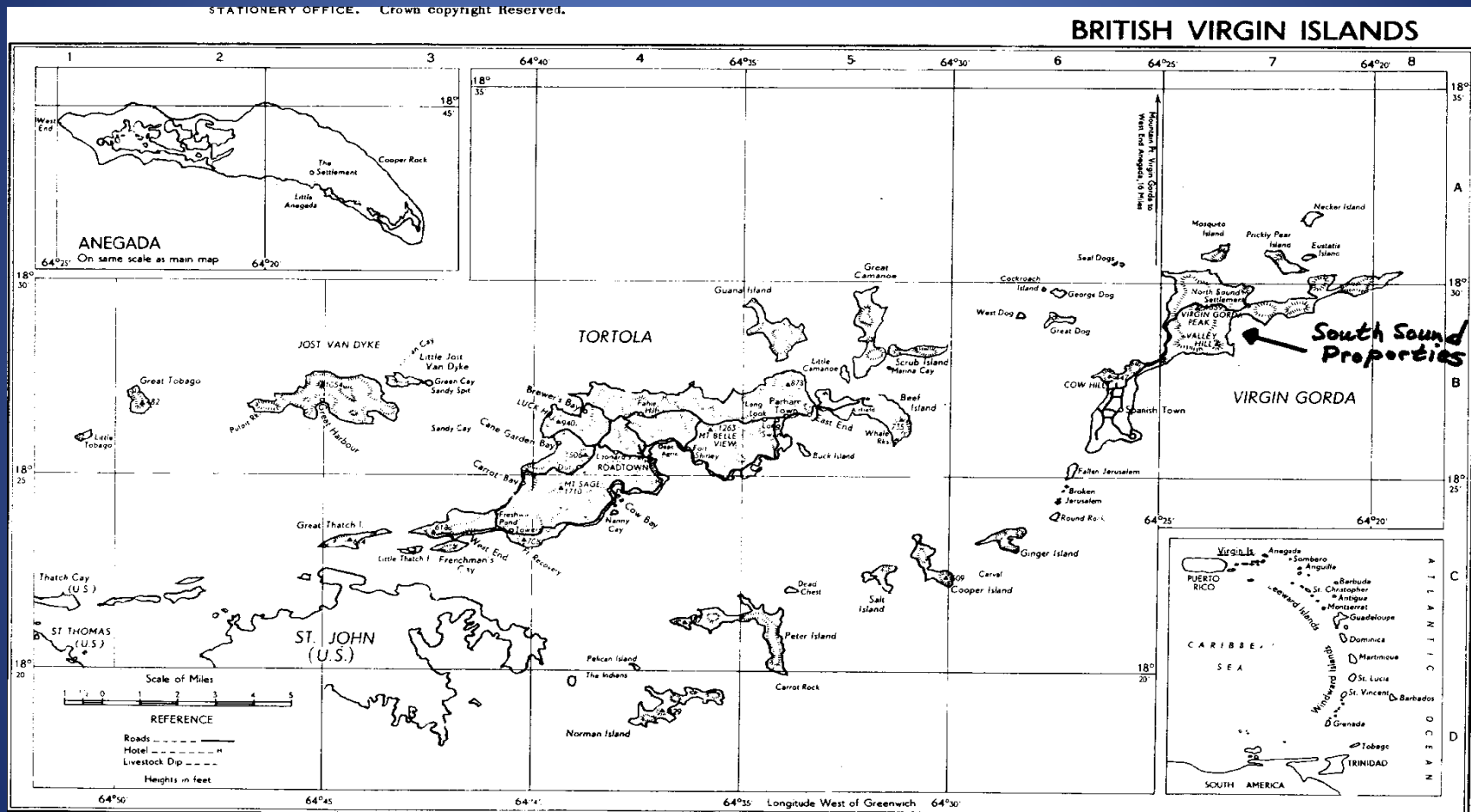
Map of San Jose State



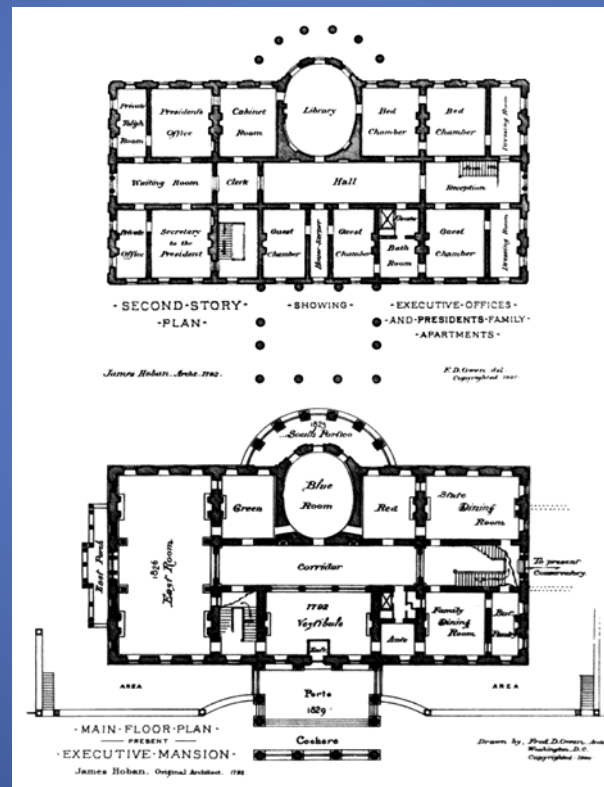
Patterns and Blueprints Do the Same Thing



Map of British Virgin Islands



James Hobans's Original Design for the White House Residence



Like bricks, your essay should connect one idea to the next, so that you have a solid and attractive wall at the end.



The best way to accomplish this task is by writing a clear thesis that

- states the topic.
- creates interest.
- is manageable.
- is specific.
- may contain subdivisions.



By doing so, you create a map for the readers that will give a broad picture of where your essay will be taking them.

The subdivisions in a thesis statement can become topic sentences for your essay. Read the following example.

Restaurant staff should be paid salaries that allow them to live on those salaries because tips are not guaranteed, staff endure more abuse than people in other types of jobs, and it would be more convenient for diners to not have to think about tips.

Can you see the ways you might organize this essay?



This information also guides you in finding data to support your claims.

We made it, and it's more beautiful than we imagined.



[Grand Canyon Suite](#)