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## Thesis-Based Writing

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College writing often asks you to present a reasonable argument, arguable claim (often in the form of a thesis) and support that claim with evidence. Thesis-based writing may seek to convince an audience that the writer's claim is true, but it just as commonly aims to get the audience to see the writer's claim as reasonable or plausible. Though expectations differ by discipline, some of the most common elements include a thesis, evidence, refutation, and a conclusion.

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### Thesis

A thesis is an arguable claim that must be supported with evidence to convince reasonable readers. The following is an example of a thesis:

*Pro football players' high salaries are justified because they put money into the economy by supporting people and business.*

As long as this writer finds evidence to show that football players spend their money in local communities, they might convince readers that high salaries are acceptable. If the writer had simply said: *Football players are not overpaid*, they would have been expressing an opinion without clear support. On the other hand, if they had said: *The average salary of a pro-football player is \$4.2million*, they would have been stating a fact, which can be verified as true or false. A thesis is more carefully supported than an opinion and is arguable, versus facts, which are true in all cases.

For more details on how to write a thesis, see the Connors Writing Center handout on [Developing a Thesis](#).

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### Evidence

Evidence is the information that you gather in support of your thesis. It can take many forms: facts, examples, statistics, opinions from experts, and so on. What make for valid evidence varies across disciplines. Generally, in thesis-based writing, you will be expected to provide evidence from research, citing reputable experts who have already written about your general subject. You rely on the work of previous writers to establish your own authority. It shows that you are familiar with what has already been said about your topic, and it shows that you are adding meaningfully to the research that has already been done.

Often, the evidence you offer will take the form of paraphrases, summaries, or direct quotes of articles or other sources that are considered reputable. Make sure that you familiarize yourself with your field's citation conventions so you can cite these sources properly.

For more details on using evidence, see the Connors Writing Center handouts on [Using Outside Sources](#), [The Rhetorical Triangle](#), or any of our [Citation Styles](#) handouts.

## **Refutation**

Some writers make the mistake of only citing evidence in support of their own argument. After all, why would you want to draw your readers' attention to a contradictory viewpoint? However, a good argument can be strengthened if you take the time to introduce alternate or contradictory viewpoints and then refute them. Since an argument is simply one perspective, readers can—and often will—see other sides to the issue whether you point them out or not. So, it's helpful to point out some of the most significant counter-perspectives and to respond to them in some way. Doing so accomplishes two things: it demonstrates your commitment to fairness, and it also shows that you are widely read and knowledgeable about all aspects of your subject.

Some of the most common strategies for responding to alternative views include:

- **Agreement**: Acknowledging the opposition has good points.
- **Qualifying**: Acknowledging the opposition has good points but that they are limited to specific circumstances or are more complex than how the opposition presented them.
- **Refuting**: Demonstrating how the opposition is wrong/mistaken.
- **Elaboration**: Recognizing the validity of an alternate viewpoint but adding to it with an overlooked idea or new evidence.

Think of agreement as saying “Yes” to the opposition, qualifying as saying “Yes, but.” refutation as “No,” and elaboration as “Yes, and.”

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## **Conclusion**

Thesis-based writing does not trail off at the end. Sometimes, the conclusion will reiterate the key points of your paper. Often, you may also want to leave the reader with a strong impression of what you want them to ultimately do or think. As in the closing statements of legal proceedings, the conclusion is an important opportunity to finish memorably after the evidence has been presented and other views have been considered. Some common techniques for strong conclusions include echoing the introduction, challenging the reader to think about the material in a new way, or looking to the future.

For more details on each of these strategies, see the Connors Writing Center handout on **Conclusions**.

