Thesis Statement Activity

Please split up into groups of three (3) and write down your group’s response to the following:

1. What is a thesis statement? More specifically, what function does it serve and why is it important?

2. List $\geq 3$ characteristics of a strong thesis statement.

3. List $\geq 3$ characteristics of a poor thesis statement. (Be more creative than simply choosing the opposite of your response to item 2).
Engineering 185: Writing Workshop
Developing Problem Statements

School of Engineering and Applied Sciences
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Discussion 1
What is a problem statement?

Definition

Problem statements lead the reader from a shared context to the perception of a problem, and on to a proposed solution.

Three Key Points

1. Context — Establish a context for your audience
2. Problem — Define the problem within this context
3. Solution — Propose a solution to this problem
The elements of a problem statement

**Five Main Elements**

1. Status Quo
2. Destabilizing Moment
3. Questions
4. Consequences
5. Solution
The *status quo* refers in general to things as they are.

To persuade people to change their minds or their actions, you must first convince them to reexamine the *status quo*.

Stating the *status quo*:
- creates common ground between reader and writer
- establishes certain shared information and assumptions
- helps establish the context of your larger argument
In general terms, the *destabilizing moment* expresses a question or predicament, motivates a change in thought or action, introduces a cost, demonstrates a need, reveals inadequacies, assesses difficulties, and projects benefits.
It is important to anticipate questions your audience may have regarding your discussion early on.

Focus on answering the question: “so what?”

Show the reader that this discussion is worthwhile and significant.
For an argument to sway audiences, readers need to recognize their own priorities and concerns in the costs, consequences, or benefits you present to them.

Readers recognize as persuasive consequences those effects that would cause them either to benefit or to suffer in some way.
The solution is your response to the problem introduced in your claim.

It can be a resolution or a proposed resolution of the issues introduced by the problem statement.

Think:

- What does your audience need to know to appreciate the solution you propose?
- What makes it easy or difficult to accept?
- What are the benefits/disadvantages of your solution over other ones?
“The properties of water at the nanoscale are crucial in many areas of biology, but the confinement of water molecules in sub-nanometre channels in biological systems has received relatively little attention. Advances in nanotechnology make it possible to explore the role played by water molecules in living systems, potentially leading to the development of ultrasensitive biosensors,” (Mertens, J., et al.)

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2. destabilizing moment
3. solution
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In-class activity

Choose one of the “California problems” listed on the assignment handout.

Write a problem statement from each of the following viewpoints:

1. Humanistic—How would Arnold Schwarzenegger formulate a problem statement for this issue?

2. Technical—How would one of your engineering professors formulate a problem statement for this issue?

Trade with your neighbor and critique one another's problem statements.