

Thesis Statement / Outline Exercise

Note: This exercise is due at the beginning of class on **Friday February 22**

Purpose: In this assignment you will write a concise thesis statement and outline that will guide you in writing the research paper.

Use the research paper to demonstrate your individual mastery of your topic through a critical appraisal of the arguments raised by the various stakeholder groups. The paper will be 5-7 pages long plus your bibliography and graphics. In that paper you will:

- Provide a brief background to the issue including your stakeholder groups' argument;
- Critically evaluate that argument in relation to other stakeholder positions;
- State and defend your own position. (The statement of your position is your thesis statement.)

Thesis statement: A thesis statement tells the reader what you will argue. It should be concise and come early in the paper, usually in the first two or three paragraphs. Everything in the paper should serve support that thesis statement. Every book should have some kind of thesis statement. For example, the very first sentence in Ehrlich and Ehrlich's "Betrayal of Science and Reason" is this: "The time has come to write a book about effort being made to minimize the seriousness of environmental problems. We call these attempts the 'brownlash' because they help fuel a backlash against 'green' policies." In one sentence we know the author's intent and have defined a key term. (See if you can find a thesis statement in McMichael.)

For your research paper the thesis statement should answer the debate question for your case. Consider this question as an example: Is world population likely to overshoot earth's carrying capacity?

- Thesis statement 1: In this paper I will argue that the demographic "momentum" in the world's developing countries will exceed the earth's capacity.
- Thesis statement 2: While many are pessimistic that population growth will result in mass starvation, the evidence suggests that a more equitable distribution of resources would avert such catastrophe.

Outline: The outline is a roadmap of your paper. Writing outlines helps you organize your thoughts in skeleton form before you get into the thick of writing. A table of contents is a kind of outline. The outline you must create for this assignment must have enough detail so that your TA can get an sense that you have the right evidence and structure to support your thesis statement.

Here is an example of an outline to support "Thesis Statement 1".

1. Introduction: The introduction will include a one paragraph description of the issue leading to the debate question. The second paragraph begins with my thesis statement “that the demographic momentum in the world’s developing countries will exceed the earth’s capacity.” The third paragraph will outline the rest of the paper
2. This section reviews major argument about the issue of population and includes that the central issue has to do with the built in demographic momentum in countries that, as far as we can predict so far, will continue to have high fertility rates despite declining access to resources. For evidence I will use population pyramids of developing countries and United Nations population projections in Africa and SE Asia.
3. This section argues that the cornucopian optimists are incorrect in their assumption that technological innovation will avert the overshoot problem. For evidence, I will discuss the flawed logic of the Green Revolution.
4. This section discusses the concept of carrying capacity arguing that the future resilience of renewable resource is likely to decline due to climate change. Thus, even while populations are increasing, the capacity of the earth to sustain population is becoming increasingly fragile.
5. The final section of this paper returns to the thesis that the stage is set for an almost inevitable overshoot. I tentatively conclude that rather than throwing our hands up in dismay we work now to mitigate the effects of this overshoot on vulnerable populations.