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## Covering the Basics: The Importance of a Good Layout and Strong Thesis

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## Abstract

Thesis writing is key to tutoring. A strong thesis performs numerous functions: covering smaller concerns, teaching writers how to structure their paper, and giving a strong layout. Using a focus on thesis teaching makes the tutoring session easier and more efficient for both the tutor and client too.

Keywords: thesis, tutoring, writing centers, organization, layout

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### Covering the Basics: The Importance of a Good Layout and Strong Thesis

With the limited time each session allows, it can be difficult to decide what to cover with a client. Writing is an inherently complex art, full of arenas to struggle in. Grammar, syntax, formatting styles, flow, diction, and purpose are all key examples of focuses to consider. Covering all of these issues within a single session is never feasible. Tutors can't fully cover every idea, and students are usually left feeling overwhelmed. Yet, tutors want to help students cover all the bases and know where to go next with their writing. This contradiction can often make it difficult to know how much information is the right amount. By focusing on helping the student craft a strong thesis statement and layout for their paper, a tutor can catch a lot of smaller issues at their roots.

Through my sessions as a tutor, many of my students have had issues that seem differing at first but can be tied to a common weak point: the paper's thesis. A paper with a weak or missing thesis runs into all kinds of potential issues. The paper can feel rambling or like it's going in too many directions at once. Creating a strong thesis remedies countless issues and allows a tutor to help a student with lots of smaller, offshoot concerns. A study recently found that 60.7% of comments from students seeking tutoring were centered around higher-order concerns (thesis, organization, development, etc.) rather than lower-order concerns (grammar, punctuation, etc.) (Cross and Catchings). Since the majority of students had questions focused on

more complex ideas, explaining a thesis can answer the many of a student's concerns. Most of these higher-order concerns can either be fully covered by a conversation about thesis structure or at least strengthened by it.

I had a client early on in my tutoring with many smaller issues in their paper. At first, I tried to explain them all one by one. However, we both were starting to get overwhelmed and I felt I was doing more harm than help. So, I took a step back and we started talking about their paper in broader terms. The student explained that they were unsure of how to include a thesis because the assignment wasn't argumentative in nature. When they said this, it clicked for me. A lot of the problems were tied to that. The lack of a clear thesis or main idea was robbing the paper of its flow and direction. Once we started working from there, things began to fall into place.

The thesis functions as a foundation for the paper. Working with students on different papers for different subjects and different formats has shown me the importance of the thesis. Many students know they are supposed to write a thesis but haven't ever been told why. Sure, it states their point or main idea but it does so much more. A good thesis statement lets the audience see a glimpse into the paper. It makes sure we know what our sub-claims are. It gives us a chance to double check we know what our paper is covering and to what degree of depth. A thesis can function a lot like an abstract in a research paper. Abstracts are used to give the reader a quick summary of all the important points of the writing. A thesis does the same thing, allowing us to shrink down a paper to a single sentence to make sure it's what we want to write.

Learning how to craft a strong thesis also allows students to learn a general format and apply it to their other writing. Teaching a student how to create a thesis in general sets them up to continue to see benefits for other assignments they will write (Cardinal). Covering a basic idea

like a thesis is applicable for all types of writing gives students a base to build off of. Future papers are less likely to struggle from similar issues of flow and structure. Trying to catch smaller issues individually can help with eliminating these problems short term but it is much less generally applicable. This focus on each problem is also more for the tutor to cram into a session, easier for the client to feel overwhelmed, and more for them to remember. A thesis statement functions as the core for many ideas. Thesis writing connects to other higher-order concerns and allows the student to remember these other issues by proxy, even on different assignments.

One of the high-order concerns that thesis writing helps solve is layout. The layout of a paper and its thesis are directly tied together. The way I explain it is with the analogy of a road trip. The thesis functions as a roadmap for the body, letting us know where we are headed and what broad ideas we will hit on the way. This roadmap should mention the argument or main idea and often the subclaims/body sections. Crafting a clear, concise thesis sets a tone and path for not only the writer, but their audience as well.

Thesis teaching is key to successful tutoring. Helping students to create a base for their current paper, as well as writing in general, sets them up to succeed while not overwhelming either party. By focusing on basic, higher-order ideas, lots of issues can be addressed without being directly covered. Once a strong thesis has been crafted, the rest of the paper has a general outline that can help with layout issues too! As tutors, we should make sure that teaching thesis crafting is front and center in our work.

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