



## Expanding The Thesis

### Use Subordinate Clauses

Two great words for helping students expand their thesis statements are "although" and "because."

#### "Although..."

If a student has a supportable but not arguable, ask her to put "although" in front of it, add a comma, and then add a second clause. The subordinate clause upends students' thinking by taking an obvious statement and complicating it. For example:

**Initial thesis:** "Hamlet seems clinically depressed and therefore suicidal since his father's death and his mother's remarriage." (Arguable but mostly agreed upon, very supportable, not at all complex)

**Although thesis:** "Although Hamlet seems clinically depressed and therefore suicidal since his father's death and his mother's remarriage, he exhibited these characteristics well before those dramatic events." (Arguable, supportable, complex -- adds nuance to the "since" part of the first clause)

**Alternative although thesis:** "Although Hamlet seems clinically depressed and therefore suicidal since his father's death and his mother's remarriage, he is neither: instead, he feigns such behavior to better observe the actions of those around him." (Arguable, supportable, complex -- adds nuance to the "depressed and suicidal" part of the first clause)

"Although" can help a student with a straightforwardly factual thesis create an argument as well:

**Initial thesis:** "The United States is comprised of 50 states and 16 territories." (Supportable, but not at all arguable or complex)

**Although thesis:** "Although the United States is comprised of 50 states and 16 territories, several of those territories should be granted 'state' status." (Arguable, supportable, more complex than the previous version)

**Alternative although thesis:** "Although the United States is comprised of 50 states and 16 territories, the relationship among them calls into question the



word 'united' in our country's title; with so much power concentrated in the states, the federal government is currently too weak to enact a unified vision for the country." (Arguable, supportable, complex)

"Because..."

"Because" can also be useful in expanding thesis statements and can be used to modify the primary clause or to create a second clause. For example,

"The United States is comprised of 50 states and 16 territories because of a series of racially-based political decisions that distinguished unfairly between full and partial statehood."

"Because the United States is comprised of 50 states and 16 territories, most Americans do not recognize the plight of the territorial residents, who have only partial access to America's bounty and constitutional protections."

"Because Hamlet seems clinically depressed and therefore suicidal since his father's death and his mother's remarriage, Gertrude and Claudius assume that he has also lost his sanity and moral clarity, which is far from the truth."

So many possibilities are opened by using "although" and "because" that this activity can become a game: ask students to produce three "although" and three "because" theses for each primary thesis statement, each of which makes a different argument. Doing so shows students the vast number of directions a thesis can go.

### A Student Example

My student's initial thesis, for an essay about *Romeo and Juliet*, was "Romeo and Juliet allow their true love to grow and completely consume them," a thesis that is supportable but not arguable or complex. To expand her idea, she added this clause to the end of the sentence: "but it also causes them to behave in an extreme manner." While this clause would lengthen her essay, it does not improve the thesis' arguability or complexity.

Reframing with "although," she wrote, "Although Romeo and Juliet define and experience true love differently, they are both completely consumed by this love, which causes them to behave in extreme manners." The student would have to prove, again, that the characters are consumed by love and behave in extreme ways, but she would create a new and intriguing contrast.

"Romeo and Juliet experience love differently" is not what I had expected the student to write. I had thought that she would add "although" to her current argument: "Although



Romeo and Juliet are consumed by love and behave in an extreme manner, their love is actually not as meaningful as they think it is.” I had anticipated this thesis because this is my reading of the play. But this student, unlike me, regarded their love as genuine and did not wish to undermine that aspect of her argument. Instead, she used her original clause as the central argument and created a new subordinate clause.

This ended up being a strong, arguable essay – far more than it would have been without that “although” addition – and she did not struggle to write a longer essay because she began with more issues to address.

## Increasing Sophistication

As students’ writing matures, they can diversify their phrasing so they do not rely so consistently or exclusively on “because” and “although.” In part, that can be done through simple vocabulary replacements (while, as, since), but it can also be done by rethinking the nature of the thesis statement more profoundly: can it become two sentences? Should they be sequential? Could the new clause become the entire thesis? Each of these is possible, and students who have learned to develop thesis ideas can use each at different times, for different genres or audiences.