

# How to write a thesis statement

Religion 274  
Roger Graves  
Director, Writing Across the Curriculum

# Roger Graves



## Roger Graves

Director, Writing Across the Curriculum

Professor, EFS

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wac

c4w

writing initiatives

webmail

efs

I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian

### Recent presentations

This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

### Books

This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited




### Blog: Thinking About Writing


A new blog on writing-related issues

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html>

# Writing Across the Curriculum



Writing Initiatives  
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Today:  
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**C4W**  
WRS Courses  
Roger Graves  
Blog  
Academic Honesty

Would you like to improve the writing of your students? Improve their learning of your lecture material? Are you looking for new ways to engage your students in your course materials? If this interests you, contact [Roger Graves](#): or 492.2169

What can we do for individual instructors:

- meet to talk about ways to incorporate informal (short, impromptu) writing assignments into any class, small or large
- review via email any assignment you give students that has a writing component to help make it clearer for students and to help develop grading rubrics to improve the speed and accuracy of grading
- visit your class to help students get started on your writing assignments

What can we do for departments:

- hold workshops on creating good writing assignments
- host discussions of how to improve the writing of students in your programs
- conduct reviews of writing assignments in your departments courses to identify exactly what your students are being asked to write—and to ensure that they have access to resources on how to write (online and on-campus)

**Upcoming Presentations and Workshops:**

<http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/WAC/>

# Centre for Writers



Writing Initiatives  
University of Alberta



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## Welcome to the Centre for Writers

We offer **free** one-on-one writing coaching and support to all students, instructors and staff at the University of Alberta - in any faculty or at any level of study.

Our writing coaches are available to assist clients with higher order concerns in their writing, such as thesis formation, organization and idea development, as well as more specific details, like grammar and documentation style. Clients can bring in any writing project at any stage of development: essays, lab reports, creative pieces, scholarly articles, thesis drafts, application letters - and more. Our coaches will also help students read instructor comments on already-graded papers. ESL and EAL students are welcome!

**Request a class room visit by a tutor.**

**Welcome back for the Fall 2009 term! Tutoring hours will begin on Monday, September 14. The online appointment-booking schedule will be available to clients as soon as possible prior to this date. We look forward to working with you!**



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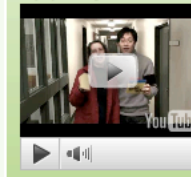
**Express News**

### Twitter Updates

The Centre for Writers will open for the fall term on Monday, September 14! 5 days ago

[follow me on Twitter](#)

### GramWOW



<http://www.c4w.arts.ualberta.ca/>



# GRAM WOW!



# Note the verbs: Critical analysis

- Examine
- Analyze
- Critically analyze
- Historically analyze
- Assess
- Interpret
- Debate
- Consider
- Illustrate
- Evaluate
- Identify

What do these terms mean to you?

# Invention: Generate ideas

- You may write on any topic related to witchcraft, magic, and the occult, including non-European topics.
- Brainstorm, idea maps, questions

Topics:

# Annotated bibliography

- ✦ **One paragraph** (100-200 words) summarizing your proposed topic – what you are going to do, and how. This paragraph will include an underlined, *working* thesis statement. By working, I mean that you may end up changing your thesis statement as you work on your essay. This is fine.

## **An annotated bibliography**

1. Summaries of 3+ secondary sources; Summarize each reference in two to three sentences and give qualifications of the author.
1. 1+ primary source: summarize the reference; identify the author, their position/title/relationship to the topic, and the year the source was written.



# 3. Analytical/critical annotations

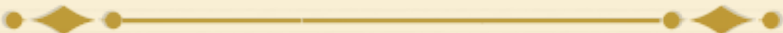


An objective evaluation of a work's contents, quality, and limitations. Length is typically between 100-200 words.

- ✦ Gives full bibliographic information for the work.
- ✦ Gives the authority and the point of view of the author.
- ✦ ~~Evaluates the contents, scope, and quality.~~
- ✦ ~~Points out the merits and deficiencies.~~

From <http://guides.library.ualberta.ca/annotations>

# Annotations



Summarizes the article (2-3 sentences; 45-60 words)

Evaluates:

- ✦ give qualifications of the author;
- ✦ identify the author, their position/title/relationship to the topic, and the year the source was written

# The essay



- ✦ Write an interesting and well-argued paper, based on scholarly sources.
- ✦ Use the work in the annotated bibliography as your sources

# The audience

- ✦ This time you are writing for a scholar of religion knowledgeable in the area of alternative spiritualities, trained as an historian. To repeat, this means I am looking for a cogent argument, well supported by appropriate sources.
- ✦ Instructor knows lots about alternative spiritualities
- ✦ Values historical research and evidence: what does that mean? What evidence counts in history? (rubric says “Provides evidence to support arguments: Ideas clearly informed by readings and properly cited” and “Uses direct quotations sparingly and effectively”)

# Methods that work to improve writing quality

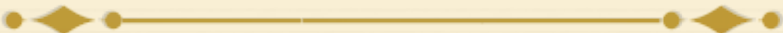
1. **Direct instruction (.80 effect size)**
2. **Peer assistance (.75)**
3. **Setting product goals (.70)**
4. Word processing software (.55)
5. Sentence combining (.50)
6. **Process approach (.32; .80 done well)**
7. Prewriting (.32)
8. Inquiry (.32)
9. Models (.25)



# Invention: Levack

- ✦ **Define** witchcraft in medieval/early modern Europe based on information from one of the following chapters from Levack
  - ✦ Power of the devil—evil not good things
  - ✦ Exploitation of secret powers in nature
  - ✦ Unnatural—anything; flying to a group gathering
  - ✦ Turning people into frogs and newts
  - ✦ Blame for bad crops
  - ✦ Conjuring people
  - ✦ Forcing people against their will
- ✦ **Evaluate** this perspective as a contemporary: is it credible?

# What topic will you study?

- 
- ✦ Identify a topic of inquiry
  - ✦ Translate that topic into a thesis by stating what your attitude is to that topic
  - ✦ In this essay I will analyze how leisure and vice combined to form what have been called “sinful pleasures” in the boom-town gold rush economy of the Klondike. The absence of traditional social hierarchies in this time and place, combined with the fuel of easy money and masculinity, accounted for this new conception of leisure.

# From the Winter class

- ✦ Magic as a transformation of the mind
- ✦ Christianization of pagan rituals
- ✦ History of religious practices isn't progressive from one religious practice to another—it is not a linear progression.
- ✦ Many of the traditional practices of the Christian holidays—the date, the tree, the star-- arose from pagan traditions. Co-opted and incorporated

# Turn a topics into a thesis

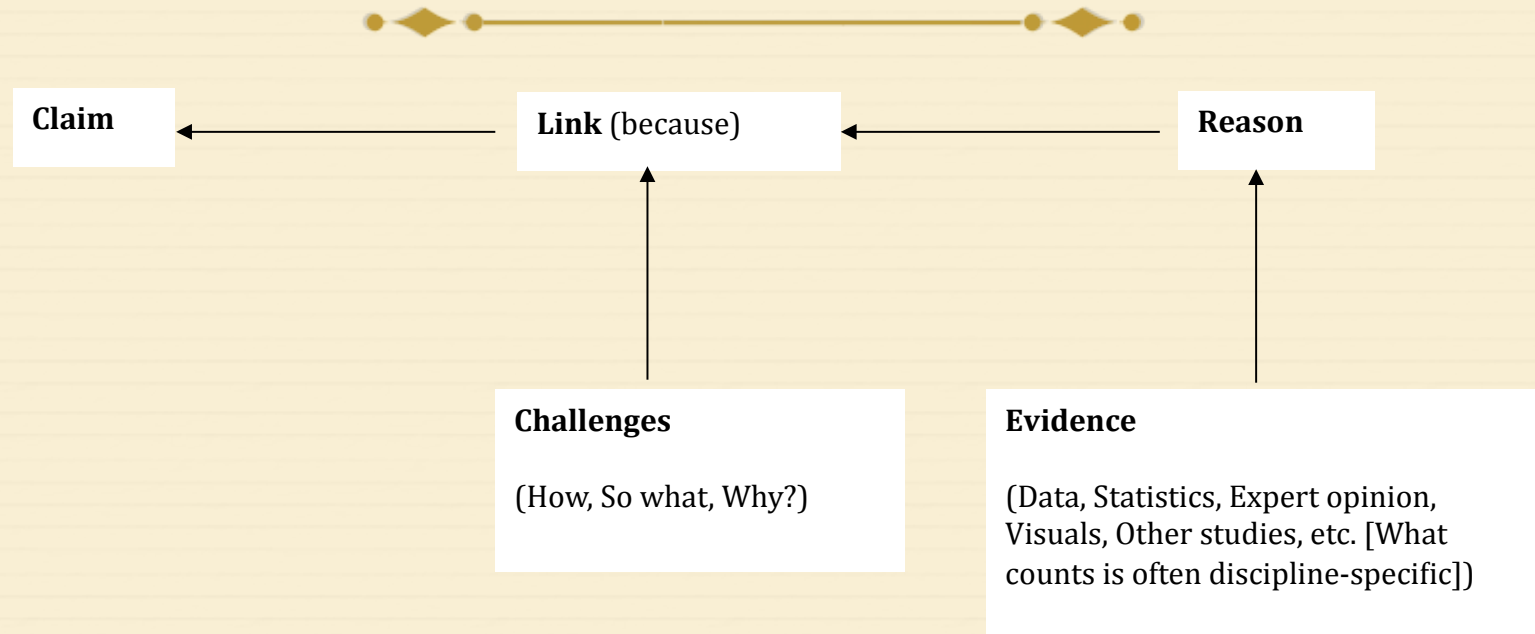
- ✦ Witchcraft was defined as someone using otherworldly powers to bring down other people, including using spells, alchemy, divination, and astrology. To the average person living in the time of the black plague, this would have seemed reasonable.

# Your argument

- Main claim
- Subsidiary claims



# Informal Argument and Academic Writing



Ex. [this study] will be a unique scholarly contribution as very few studies genuinely combine oral history and the documentary record.

# Claims and Assumptions



- Claim + stated reason rest upon an unstated reason
- Both the stated and unstated reasons rely on shared assumptions of value between the writer and the reader
- Evidence demonstrates the validity of the stated or unstated reasons
- When values are shared, less evidence is needed to convince the reader

# A claim in 3 parts

- ✦ By engaging in historical/archival research, by reviewing the vast amount of public information now available on [this topic], and by conducting interviews with policy makers, researchers, activists and industry representatives, **my research will develop a systematic assessment** of [topic] and the conditions in which it has become finalized.

# Getting organized

- Thesis= main claim, argument  
The absence of traditional social hierarchies in this time and place, combined with the fuel of easy money and masculinity, accounted for this new conception of leisure
- Body: subsidiary claims
  1. Free enterprise capitalism in the Klondike contributed to a dominant ideological stance that valued the free choice of the individual to pursue whatever leisure activities they wanted—including gambling, drinking to excess, and womanizing—with few, if any, restraints.
  2. Leisure in the Klondike boomtown created and enforced a particular kind of masculinity in contrast to the “rational recreation” of more established cities and towns in the Northwest.

# Body—Part 1

- Free enterprise capitalism in the Klondike contributed to a dominant ideological stance that valued the free choice of the individual to pursue whatever leisure activities they wanted—including gambling, drinking to excess, and womanizing—with few, if any, restraints.

Implied in this claim is the structure (order) of the next part of the essay:

1. A section or paragraph on gambling
2. A section or paragraph on drinking to excess
3. A section or paragraph on womanizing/sexual debauchery