Don't shout, just argue
Refining the thesis statement and perfecting those paragraphs

Learning outcomes
By the end of this session you will be able to:

- check that you have written a clear thesis statement
- have used topic sentences followed by evidence and examples

know
- what “signpost” words and phrases are and how to use them

The purpose of an essay is to...

- Make an argument
- Imagine you are a lawyer presenting a case

- Argument: take a position / thesis statement / answer the question

Arguments
An argument in life:
- A disagreement: yelling, shouting, door slamming...

An argument in critical thinking:
- A position or particular viewpoint
- Reasons to support that view

A thesis statement is a summary of the main argument
Think to yourself “what’s my point?”

Example thesis statement
Question: “The Kardashians are the epitome of popular culture” (Brown, 2011, p. 15). Discuss.

The Kardashians are the epitome of popular culture because their show and subsequent lifestyles reflect consumerist values, trivial pastimes, and superficiality.

Essay structure: the pattern

The introduction and conclusion mirror each other

The introduction
- Broad opening statement
- Narrowing topic
- Thesis statement

Body paragraphs
- Define core concept
- Body paragraphs – explain your argument
- Start with a main or topic sentence
- Followed by evidence and examples
- Thesis statement
- Summary of key points
- Broad statement of significance of topic

The conclusion
- Broad closing statement
- Restate thesis

Centre for Teaching and Learning,
Manawatu
Thesis statements and introductions

• Take a position and make a statement (yes, no, it depends)
• Say why (the “because”)  

Write a thesis statement for this question:
Henry (2011) argues that the game of rugby exemplifies the best of New Zealand culture, however Aitken (2012) states that netball has had a greater influence on life in New Zealand. Is rugby better than netball?

Example introduction

Sport plays a significant role in influencing the norms and values that shape life in New Zealand. The game of rugby exemplifies some aspects of New Zealand culture. However, netball has had a greater influence on life in New Zealand, and is therefore a better game, because netball has increased women’s participation in sport, is a less violent game than rugby, and the morale and self-esteem of all New Zealanders has been boosted by the Silver Ferns winning more international games than the All Blacks.

What are you looking for in the thesis statement?

• Clear position: yes, no, middle ground (it depends, in some situations yes in some situations no, both equal etc.).  
• If taking the middle ground, still need to say something.
• Not like this:
  – Rugby has influenced NZ culture by... Netball has influenced NZ culture by...
• More like this:
  – Rugby and netball have both made a significant contribution to culture in NZ, therefore neither game is better than the other.

What are you looking for?

• You’re also looking for why that is the case – the because, the by, the main key ways etc.
• Why do you think what you think?

How to write a paragraph

• A paragraph should start with a “topic sentence”
  – describes the focus or point of the paragraph
  – usually followed by evidence and examples (in “body sentences”)  
• Think about your thesis statement. Your paragraphs are there to make your case.
  – you’re explaining the because, the by, the main key ways
  – this is where you explain why you think what you think - what evidence is there?

How long should a paragraph be?

How long is a piece of string?...
Make it long enough to develop your point
• A paragraph should be at least 3 sentences long.
• In academic writing, it can be 5-8 sentences long.

Do the upside down test

Turn into smaller paragraphs:
• Spot where you move onto a new point (make a new paragraph).
• Check you have a clear topic sentence for each paragraph.

Check:
• Do some of your ideas belong together?
• If yes, join up the sections.

Check:
• Do you actually have a series of topic sentences?
• Try to expand on each of your points (think about elaborating on your point by providing evidence/examples).

• The paragraphs are long enough to develop an idea.
• But not so long they ramble or merge ideas.
The next slide is an example of a paragraph that could follow this introduction.

**Introduction**
Sport plays a significant role in influencing the norms and values that shape our life in New Zealand. The game of rugby exemplifies some aspects of New Zealand culture. However, netball has had a greater influence on life in New Zealand, and is therefore a better game, because netball has increased women’s participation in sport, is a less violent game than rugby, and the morale and self-esteem of all New Zealanders has been boosted by the Silver Ferns winning more international games than the All Blacks.

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**Example paragraph**
The significant influence of netball on life in New Zealand is illustrated by the work of Netball NZ increasing women’s participation in sport. Women constitute 51% of the population in NZ (Statistics NZ, 2012), yet historically, women’s participation in sport has been much lower than men’s. For example, research conducted by Frederick, Jobson, and Friend (1989) showed that over 20 years ago only 15% of women between 18 and 35 years of age were members of a sports team, compared to 53% of men in the same age group. Furthermore, 50 years ago the participation rate was only 4% (Streep, 2001). However, due to the social campaigns and advertising designed by NetBall NZ, women’s involvement in sport in the same age group has increased substantially, and in 2011 was at 48% (Britney, 2011; Spears, 2012). While this level is still lower than men’s involvement in sport, the positive influence that netball has had on New Zealand life is undeniable.

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**What are you looking for in a paragraph?**
- Topic sentence
- Evidence and examples
- Links back to the thesis statement
  - have you made it clear why this is relevant to the topic
- Citations
  - refer to theories and ideas of others
  - use examples and evidence to make your case
- Can end with a conclusion

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**What are you looking for in a paragraph?**
- Clear links between the ideas in the paragraph
- Use “signpost” words and phrases
  - Furthermore, moreover, in contrast, similarly, for example
- Ask yourself “how does this sentence relate to the previous one”?
  - Do my sentences read as disjointed facts? Or
  - Do the ideas flow from one to the other?

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**Back to our paragraph**
The significant influence of netball on life in New Zealand is illustrated by the work of Netball NZ increasing women’s participation in sport. Women constitute 51% of the population in NZ (Statistics NZ, 2012), yet historically, women’s participation in sport has been much lower than men’s. For example, research conducted by Frederick, Jobson and Friends (1989) showed that over 20 years ago only 15 per cent of women between 18-35 years of age were members of a sports team compared to 53 per cent of men in the same age group. Furthermore, 50 years ago the participation rate was only 4% (Streep, 2001). However, due to the social campaigns and advertising designed by NetBall NZ, women’s involvement in sport in the same age group has increased substantially, and in 2011 was at 48% (Britney, 2011; Spears, 2012). While this level is still lower than men’s involvement in sport, the positive influence that netball has had on New Zealand life is undeniable.

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**Quick quiz**
1. What is a thesis statement?
2. What is a topic sentence?
3. Provide three examples of “signpost” words.