Thesis Statements: From the Blandly Personal to the Deeply Academic

When you think of a thesis statement, perhaps the first thing that comes to mind is a requirement for a class paper. Thesis statements, however, abound in our society, and many show up in your life outside the classroom. You might, for instance, find them in your attitudes and opinions about life at West Virginia University, or, if something bothers you enough, you might feel provoked to act upon those opinions by proposing University-wide change in a letter to the editor of the DA. Wherever you have a position to support or a side to champion, you’re likely to find a thesis statement.

As we begin to move from more reflective, evaluative assignments into our final, argumentative paper, I’d like you to think of the types of theses out there and to begin to develop criteria for recognizing them. For this workshop, I’d like you to consider the following three categories for theses: personal, public, and academic.

With your presentation group, or with your own group and another if you have two or fewer people, read through the following thesis statements. Determine which category you’d place the statement in. Then, as a group, make a list of characteristics that helped you to decide how to place the statements. I will not collect your work, but we will make some lists on the board.

Thesis Statements

My mom is the best cook ever.

Macintosh OS X is the most advanced operating system for the personal computer user.

Jeffrey Eugenides’ first novel, The Virgin Suicides, which addresses the suicides of five teenage sisters through the perspective of a collective adolescent male narrator, provides an excellent example of double burial.

This prologue argues that American Psycho, since its release, has generated a great deal of response, the first wave of it rather unthinking, the current considerations being impressed by the book’s depth and subtlety. We have looked at the first wave quickly. I will summarize the later considerations with more depth.

Morgantown Mall should address—and soon—the pothole problems that make driving up to and around the mall dangerous to all cars smaller than Ford F250 pick-up trucks.

That’s the best damn dog I ever had.
All eligible voters in West Virginia should cast their ballots in the next election.

In Spiegelman’s *Maus*, Vladek “tells” his story, Art interviews, and stories surround the circumstances of the interviews. Marianne Hirsch, in “Mourning and Postmemory,” draws attention to memory in *Maus* I and II (hereafter, I and II). In particular, she explores postmemory, which she defines as “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection,” it is “mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (22). Hirsch points to the photographs in *Maus* as “documents both of memory (the survivor’s) and of ‘postmemory’ (that of the child of survivors)” (21-2). Hirsch fails to note several other moments—not photographs, but other visual moments—that attempt to break the framed distance between Vladek and Art. These moments serve to underscore Hirsch’s central insight.

Ferrets are better pets than fish or prairie dogs, and I should know; I’ve owned all three.

While parking is an issue that bedevils most municipalities, few know or understand the complex web of issues that must be accounted for in accommodating automobiles.

Parking sucks at WVU.