

Term Paper Comment Codes

CT = Clarify Thesis: This means that whatever you stated as a theme was not perfectly clear and/or it was not stated as a theme (complete sentence, general truth, not a moral).

TS = Topic Sentence

a = You don't have one in this paragraph.

b = Your topic sentence does not mention your thesis.

Many of the body paragraphs began with things like this: "In Animal Farm, Napoleon is the leader, and he..." This is merely summary of what was in the text, and some of this is needed as evidence to support your claims, but long passages of summary with no mention of how it supports the thesis was a common problem. Topic sentences are the best time to make that connection, so a) you have to have one, and b) it has to mention your thesis in some way. Does a topic sentence always have to be the first sentence? No, but it has to appear somewhere and clearly state what the paragraph is proving about the theme. Topic sentences are your opportunity to constantly remind the reader of your thesis and illustrate how you are proving it.

Also, topic sentences (like thesis statements and themes) have to be able to stand on their own as sentences. They should not depend on other sentences to be clear. Don't do this: *Guy Montag learned that ignorance was not really bliss. This is a theme that is found in many of the texts.* Do this: *According to many of the texts, ignorance is not bliss.*

W = Warrant: This means that you had evidence (a quote or summary of part of the text) and you had a conclusion that you had drawn from that evidence, but you did not have enough explanation of how that evidence supported that conclusion. This was the most common problem in the term papers because the concept of a warrant may be new to you, or you may believe that sometimes your evidence is self-explanatory. It isn't. ALWAYS explain how it supports your thesis as clearly and simply as possible. Also, your warrant should be about as long as the evidence itself, not just a sentence thrown in at the end of the paragraph. If you were quoting massive passages of text and expecting them to be self-explanatory, all you really wrote was a book report. Your warrant explains why all the evidence is significant and how it proves your claim.

What else did I Notice in the Term Papers? (Select those that apply to you.)

Capitalization and punctuation was stunningly sloppy in some papers. This was not a long text message; it was a formal term paper. At this level, you should ALWAYS illustrate that you know the basics of capitalization and punctuation, even in informal writing, so it surprised me how many people must have ignored the spell check and made no effort to capitalize titles of books, names, and even the first words in sentences. ??!

"I" – When writing formal papers, stick with third-person. It isn't your story that is the important thing, but the logic of your argument. The paper should read as though the

writer's main focus was proving the claim (thesis), not telling his own part in the story, "preaching" about how things should be, or sharing his opinions about the quality of the experience. Don't do this: *My first example is....* Not only does that leave your reader wondering "First example of what?!" but it also indicates that you own the example.

"You" – Again, third-person. Don't turn your argument into a sermon that assaults the reader with continual instructions and advice.

Bubba: "I am going to tell you about..." "My essay will prove..." "In this paragraph, I will explain..." Bubba announces himself. Don't do that! Instead of telling us what you are going to say, just say it! Write direct and clear topic sentences without insinuating yourself into the flow of ideas.

Introductory paragraphs often included no attention-getter or background information. Some papers launched into the theme statement without setting the stage at all. Some papers had no introductory paragraph. This shows no awareness of audience at all. Your readers must be "with you" for the entirety of your paper, and that is almost impossible if you don't make an effort to keep them informed. We've already mentioned warrants, but it starts in the introduction. Could you rewrite yours so that it conforms to all the suggestions so far?

Thesis (Claim): Not only should it be very clearly stated in the introduction, but it should be mentioned repeatedly throughout the paper. Your purpose is to prove this claim with logical evidence, but some of the papers strayed so far from the thesis that by the end they were actually saying something different than when they started. (Sometimes it takes a first draft just to find out what you actually believe and have evidence to support.) Topic sentences are a great opportunity to restate the thesis: *Animal Farm supports the theme that power corrupts through the characterization of Napoleon.* Warrants remind the reader what all your evidence is supposed to be proving: *As a general rule, tyrants do not make good leaders, and because he is corrupted by power, Napoleon evolves into a tyrant.*