

THESIS STATEMENTS IN ESSAYS

What is a thesis?

- A thesis statement is a statement of an argument that you intend to prove. A good thesis statement makes the difference between a thoughtful essay and a simple retelling of facts

Attributes of a good thesis:

- The thesis statement is typically located at the end of your opening paragraph. (The opening paragraph serves to set the context for the thesis.)
- The thesis statement is the “engine” which drives the entire essay.
- Remember, your reader will be looking for your thesis. Make it complete, clear, strong, and easy to find.

- **I. UNDERSTAND THE PROMPT**

SAMPLE PROMPT: *Discuss the novel's setting and show how the setting helps to communicate the **novel's theme**.*

- **Divide into subsections:** #1 novel's setting; #2 setting and theme.
- **Ask questions:** What is the novel's setting? How is the setting described? Why is the setting significant? Does the setting affect the characters? Does the setting change? If so, how does the change in setting affect the plot? What is the theme of the novel? How do the setting and theme relate to each other?

2. DEVELOP A THESIS

- **Poor thesis:** The novel's setting helps to communicate the theme.
- **Explanation:** This thesis sounds too much like the prompt. How would you like to read many essays that all have the same unimaginative beginning? I wouldn't, and neither would the AP graders. HINT. HINT.

2. DEVELOP A THESIS

- **Better thesis:** In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the dark, mysterious landscape of the largely unexplored interior of the African jungle mirrors Marlow's inner struggle to overcome his evil nature.
- **Explanation:** This thesis is better than the other two because it states what the writer intends to say in the essay, and it provides the writer's opinion/point of view concerning the work being analyzed. The thesis does not directly identify the theme, but it does seem to suggest where the writer is headed with regards to his/her discussion of theme. *Notice that the third person, not first nor the second person, is being used.*

2. DEVELOP A THESIS

- **Best thesis:** In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the dense, mysterious landscape of the largely unexplored interior of the African jungle represents the darkness in man's heart, a darkness that the protagonist, Marlow, and all people struggle to overcome.
- **Explanation:** This thesis is, admittedly, wordy. Not all great theses need to be this long. In fact, the thesis would be a success if it had stopped after the phrase, "the darkness in man's heart." What makes this particular thesis strong is that it has all of the ingredients of the others and it specifically identifies the theme of the novel. *In class discussion; you will learn tricks of the trade that will allow you to write interesting theses and introduction paragraphs that will delight and impress your readers.*

Sentence Formulas

- Formulate a sentence that focuses the ideas that will be dealt with in the paper. Following are some workable statements for writing about literature.
- The verbal, situational, and dramatic irony in help to reinforce the . . . of the novel.
- Because . . . uses imagery so well, young readers are drawn into the novel.
- Characterization, both direct and indirect, is so well used in (this story) that the characters permanently become a part of the reader's world.
- As a protagonist, . . . is one of the most admirable fictional characters because of his/her . . ., . . ., and . . .

Theme statement to thesis

Using your information and theme statement, write a concise thesis statement for the following prompt:

Discuss the elements that W.W. Jacobs uses to advance his theme in “A Monkey’s Paw”?

Attributes of a good thesis:

- • It should be contestable, proposing an arguable point with which people could reasonably disagree. A strong thesis takes a stand and justifies the discussion you will present.
- • It is specific and focused. A strong thesis proves a point without discussing “everything about Instead of music, think “American jazz in the 1 930s” and your argument about it.
- • It clearly asserts your own conclusion based on evidence. Note: Be flexible. The evidence may lead you to a conclusion you didn’t think you’d reach.
- • It provides the reader with a map to guide him/her through your work.

Attributes of a good thesis:

- • It avoids vague language (like “it seems”).
- • It avoids the first person. (“I believe,” “In my opinion”)
- • It should pass the So what? or Who cares? test (Would your most honest friend ask why he should care or respond with “but everyone knows that”?) For instance, “people should avoid driving under the influence of alcohol,” would be unlikely to evoke any opposition.

How do you know if you have a solid thesis?

Try these four tests:

- Does the thesis include all parts of the question? This is the most important fact to remember because an incomplete thesis results in an incomplete answer to the question. An inadequate essay will result, which will receive a low grade.

End of 8/28/14
Session

How do you know if you have a solid thesis?

- • Would a reasonable reader NOT respond with “Duh!” or “So what?” or “Gee, no kidding!” or “Who cares?”

How do you know if you have a solid thesis?

- Does the thesis avoid general phrasing and/or sweeping words such as “all” or “none” or “every”?

How do you know if you have a solid thesis?

- Does the thesis lead the reader toward the topic sentences (the subtopics needed to prove the thesis)?
 - *If you cannot answer “YES” to these questions, you will need to make changes in order for your thesis to pass these test*

2. DEVELOP A THESIS

- **Good thesis:** The dark, mysterious landscape of the largely unexplored interior of the African jungle serves to highlight Joseph Conrad's theme in *Heart of Darkness*.
- **Explanation:** This thesis identifies the author, the title of the work, and it provides some specific information, rather than a vague repetition of the prompt

3. SUPPORT YOUR THESIS

- Your thesis is only the beginning. Now comes the hard part: Prove your point.
- A lawyer may insist that his client is innocent, but until he/she produces irrefutable evidence the jury cannot make an informed decision. In a similar manner, you must go to the text and find proof that your thesis is credible.
- Your primary evidence will be direct quotes (e.g. Kurtz whispered, “The horror! The horror!”) and indirect quotes (e.g. Kurtz expressed horror at the thought of how far astray his original intentions had come.) The essay is only as good as the support you provide.

Consider the following questions when accumulating support:

- WHEN? When does the support that you are using occur in the text? Providing context is vital. Your reader must know what was happening in the story during the point where the support you have chosen occurred. Keep your summary of the context brief. Don't tell more than is necessary to make your point clear. Essays filled with plot summary sink in the ocean of grades like a lead weight

Consider the following questions when
accumulating support:

- • WHAT? What evidence is there to support your thesis. Here is where you will use a combination of direct and indirect quotes.

Consider the following questions when accumulating support:

- • HOW? WHY? How does the evidence support your thesis? Just because you say it doesn't make it so. Your essay may provide numerous examples, but if you don't carefully explain how those examples prove your point your grade will be disappointing. Why does the author use the particular examples that you choose to identify? Unfortunately, the author will not tell you why. You must use your advanced analysis skills to explain why.

What's the purpose of the conclusion?

- stress the importance of the thesis statement,
- give the essay a sense of completeness, and
- leave a final impression on the reader.

Conclusion

- **Answer the question "So What?"** Show your readers why this paper was important. Show them that your paper was meaningful and useful.
- **Synthesize, don't summarize**
 - Don't simply repeat things that were in your paper. They have read it. Show them how the points you made and the support and examples you used were not random, but fit together.

