

AP US History

Writing Thoroughly Developed Thesis Statements

Introduction

Writing often takes the form of persuasion - convincing others that you have an interesting, logical point of view on a particular subject. Persuasion is a skill you practice regularly in your daily life: you persuade your siblings to help you clean the house, your parents to let you borrow the car, or your friend to play your favorite game. Specific assignments often ask you to make a persuasive case in writing – that is, you are asked to convince your reader of your point of view. This form of persuasion follows a predictable pattern in writing: after a brief introduction of your topic, you state your point of view on the topic. This sentence is the thesis and it serves as the guiding point of the argument you'll make in the rest of your essay.

What Is A Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement:

- tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.

- is a road map for the essay; in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the essay.

- directly answers the question asked; a thesis is an *interpretation* of a subject, not the subject itself.

 - e.g.: the subject of an essay might be World War II; a thesis offers a specific interpretation of the war

- is a statement that someone could disagree with.

- is a sentence somewhere in your introduction (first paragraph) that presents your argument to the reader.

How Do I Create A Thesis?

When creating your thesis, ask yourself the following:

What is my answer to the question or prompt, and does my answer really answer the question as asked?

Re-reading the question after creating your thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.

Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?

If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it's possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.

Is my thesis statement broad enough?

Thesis statements that are too specific often do not have a strong argument. "George Washington was the first President" is a fact, not an argument. "George Washington was the best President" is an argument you can prove.

Process Example

Suppose you are asked to answer the following essay question:

"Did the North or the South have better reasons to fight the Civil War?"

While developing the path of your essay in an outline, your basic thesis may be this:

"The North had better reasons to fight the Civil War."

The question that this statement then begs is "What were the reasons?" Ask yourself this same question in order to begin to clarify Northern reasons for fighting the war (perhaps you think, "The North believed slavery was immoral" or "The North believed they were responsible for reunifying the United States" or "The North was provoked"). Now you have a basic thesis with three examples (a.k.a., three arguments in the standard 5-paragraph essay) on which to prove your overall argument – your thesis.

Now, push your interpretation further - why were these reasons for fighting the Civil War better?

As you plan your essay through your outline, you will begin to identify these reasons more precisely with specific information and details. Here's what it might look like:

- I. Thesis: *"The North had better reasons to fight the Civil War."*
- II. The North believed slavery was immoral
 - A. strength and reach of the abolitionist movement: Garrison, Douglass
 - B. widespread reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- III. The North believed reunification was necessary
 - A. secession was illegal: Article VI, Clause 2: supremacy clause of the Constitution
 - B. believed they were responsible for reunifying the United States: DC above Mason-Dixon line; acting gov't
- IV. The North was provoked
 - A. first seceding states: SC, MS, FL, AL, GA, LA, TX
 - B. Fort Sumter, April, 1861

After completing your outline, look back at your original, basic thesis statement. Although it directly answers the question as asked and as such, is a complete and valid thesis statement, if this was the only sentence in your introduction the reader would think, “But what were the reasons?” The introduction requires additional lead-in information in order for your statement to qualify as a “thoroughly developed thesis.” Here is an example based on the information in your outline:

“The Civil War marked a defining moment in United States history. Long simmering sectional tensions reached a critical stage in 1860–1861 when Southern slaveholding states seceded to form the Confederate States of America. Political disagreement gave way to war in April 1861, as Confederates attacked Fort Sumter, insisting on their right to leave the Union. Northern armies were raised after their role in returning the Union to its united, antebellum status was fully realized. Fighting against what they claimed were the illegality of secession and the horrors of slavery, they emerged victorious after four years of fighting that claimed over a million casualties, directly affected untold civilians, and freed the nation’s enslaved African Americans. This victory, fought for good moral and legal reasons, was necessary yet bittersweet.”

Compare this full introduction to the original basic thesis. This introductory paragraph presents a way of interpreting evidence that illuminates the significance of the question. Keep in mind that this is one of many possible interpretations of this Civil War question - it is not the one and only right answer to the question. There isn’t one right answer; there are only strong and weak thesis statements and strong and weak uses of evidence.

Now write a basic thesis statement to the following prompt (one that simply restates the question):

Jacksonian Democrats viewed themselves as the guardians of the United States Constitution, political democracy, individual liberty, and equality of economic opportunity. In light of your knowledge of the 1820s and 1830s, to what extent do you agree with the Jacksonians’ view of themselves?

Basic thesis statement: _____

Now write an outline for this basic thesis statement:

Argument #1: _____
Evidence #1: _____
Evidence #2: _____

Argument #2: _____
Evidence #1: _____
Evidence #2: _____

Argument #3: _____
Evidence #1: _____
Evidence #2: _____

Now write your introductory paragraph to include a thoroughly developed thesis: _____

