

How to Write a Thesis Statement

Your ultimate goal is to use the essay to successfully prove, argue, and/or illustrate your thesis

Observation versus Claim

Observations are statements of *fact* about the text that are obvious, conclusive, and not debatable. These are not thesis statements.

Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch of the West.

The Wicked Witch of the East first owned the ruby slippers.

People from Kansas have the ability to journey to Oz.

Claims are *theoretical* statements that are debatable and rely on interpretation, and therefore require justification and elaboration (you must prove your argument to your reader). Like in science, claims tell your reader what hypothesis you are testing in the essay. You arrive at a claim by asking driving theoretical questions (see Analysis workshop) about the sign/pattern/subject/observation in the text.

When Dorothy kills with Wicked Witch of the West, she reveals her evilness.

The ruby slippers signify Dorothy's wrath and antagonistic character.

The journey to Oz (the tornado) argues that the Depression acts as an unstoppable force of nature.

Thesis statements:

Move beyond the obvious to *persuade* your reader about an idea you have regarding the text.

Must be speculative and encourage further thought and argument.

Cannot be obvious and should be complex (or, not simple – should answer the So What?)

Should be *specific*, not broad (i.e., don't do this: *Emerson's essay deals with many life questions*. Which life questions? "Deals" is a vague verb as well. Do you mean "wrestle," "examine," "interrogate," "approve," "reject," etc.?)

Do not simply tell what happens in the text (an Observation). Rather, discuss your chosen subject's significance, meaning and/or impact. Refer to the Analysis handout for more information on analysis in essays.

Avoid:

Preachy statements (tends to involve words like "need" and "should")

People need to practice aversion and escape the conformity in society.

Personal narrative (i.e., "I," "me," "my" "us" etc.)

The film makes us wonder if violence is ever really the answer.

Telling the reader what the text "is all about." That is not an argument.

The Birds is about the Cold War.

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Working Thesis:

When you first sit down to write a thesis statement, the sentence you come up with will most likely be a “working thesis statement.” That is, you will use it to launch the writing of your essay.

However, sometimes your essay will end up in a different place than you thought, and your working thesis no longer fits. This is perfectly fine, and happens to everybody.

Instead of throwing out an essay that doesn’t follow the working thesis, you need to revise the working thesis until it declares what your essay argues.

Now you have your final thesis statement.

General Sentence Structure

[The text – optional] + (*Subject of essay – the sign*) + **Verb** + (Argument about the sign – So what?)

The dead squirrels **signify** the fragile mental state of the soldiers and the nonsensical nature of the Civil War.

When Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch of the West, she **reveals** her evilness.

[In Euripides' play, Medea,] *Medea's ruthless attitude and merciless actions to take revenge on Jason* **strongly reinforce** women's roles in Euripides' 4th century BCE society.

How to Tell if a Thesis is Argumentative or Not

- ✓ When you read it out loud or to a friend, can you or your friend understand what it says?
- ✓ Underline specific words or phrases that require proof – if you cannot, it is not argumentative.
- ✓ Can any reader of the text see your “argument”? If so, you have an observation.
- ✓ If it uses vague nouns, then it is not specific enough to be a thesis.
- ✓ Is it actually taking a side of an argument? If it is in the middle, it needs to identify the complexity of the situation (*The Wicked Witch of the West performs deeds that appear evil, but her actions are reactions to the rejections she received throughout her life*).
- ✓ Can you prove it?
- ✓ Is there a So what?

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Un-Argumentative Sentences:

Marriage is love's tangibles walls, they are defined and stable throughout time, love is the unseen passion burning between hearts that have no shields, through intense love you find the home of two hearts.

Greg Fraser shows how things are and questions them. I will find those things and analyze what I think his viewpoint is in situations where he does not say.

The literary devices emphasize the main focuses of the poem.

Throughout the poem "Habitation," there are many literary devices such as tone, structure, and imagery that help the reader capture the main idea of this poem.

In Euripides' *Medea*, it's hard for the audience to decide if they should or should not sympathize with Medea.

Jim eventually becomes aggressive, just like all men are inherently violent.

After the Wilderness demonstrates Freud's death drive.