

Creating a Thesis Statement

General Guidelines

A thesis statement should...

- Establish the main idea of your essay
- Let your readers know the goal of your essay
- Preview the body paragraphs in your essay
- Respond directly to the assignment's prompt
- Take a position or demonstrate a clear point of view

A thesis statement should not...

- Include specific evidence or examples (these should appear in your body paragraphs!)
- Address unrelated arguments
- State a well-known fact
- Be a question
- Announce what your essay will do (i.e. "In this essay, I will...")

The following versions of thesis statements are in response to the prompt: *Why are horror films popular?*

Weak Thesis: Horror films are very popular with audiences of all ages.

This thesis introduces the topic of the student's essay—that horror films are popular—but it does not take a position on *why* they are popular. The popularity of horror films is a fact, not really an arguable position; no one could reasonably argue the opposite, that horror films are not popular.

Strong Thesis: Horror films are popular because they are exciting and provide an escape from the real world.

This thesis is successful because it 1) takes a clear position on *why* horror films are popular; 2) it previews the body paragraphs of the essay, which will explore how horror films are exciting and how they provide an escape from the real world; and 3) someone could logically argue against this student's stance: they might argue that horror films are popular for completely different reasons.

Using the Prompt as a Guide

An assignment's prompt is the question or statement that tells you what to write about. Your essay's prompt can be a helpful tool to use as your guide when you create your thesis statement. While your professor may provide you with in-depth directions for an essay, you can usually identify one specific question that your prompt is asking your essay to answer. If your prompt is not a question, you can usually reword it yourself in the form of a question.

Prompt: Identify the theme of Edgar Allan Poe's poem "A Dream Within a Dream." Discuss how Poe communicates this theme.

What is this prompt asking us to do? This prompt is asking us to identify *what* the theme of Poe's poem is and *how* the poem reveals this theme. We can reword this prompt as the question "What is the theme of Edgar Allan Poe's poem 'A Dream Within a Dream', and how does he communicate it?" Our thesis statement should answer this question.

Possible thesis: Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “A Dream Within a Dream” explores the theme of mankind’s unending search for meaning through symbolism and alliteration.

This thesis is successful because it:

- States the subject: Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “A Dream Within a Dream”
- Answers the prompt question of “what is the theme?”: the poem’s theme is mankind’s search for meaning
- Answers the prompt question of how the theme is revealed in the poem: Poe uses the literary devices of symbolism and alliteration to communicate the theme
- Takes an arguable stance: someone could argue that the theme is something else entirely

Argumentative Essays

Argumentative essays typically ask you to take a specific position on a subject and present reasons for why your position is the correct one. The thesis statement for an argumentative essay should make your position clear and preview your reasons for taking that position.

Prompt: Should Election Day be a national holiday? Why or why not?

Thesis: Election Day should be a national holiday because it will allow more people the day off to vote and remind Americans of how important this right is.

This thesis takes a specific position (Election Day *should be* a national holiday) and previews the author’s reasons for this argument (to allow more people the day off to vote and remind Americans of how important the right to vote is).

Informative Essays

Informative essays present information for your readers, often in the form of research. While an informative essay may not be presenting an argument, it can present your point of view. The thesis statement for an informative essay should make your topic clear and preview the information that your essay will present.

Prompt: How can students combat stress over schoolwork?

Thesis: Students can combat stress over schoolwork by staying organized and practicing mindfulness techniques.

This thesis makes the topic of the student’s essay clear (how students can combat stress over schoolwork) and previews the information the essay will present (how students can combat stress by staying organized and practicing mindfulness techniques).

Analytical Essays

Analytical essays present an argument about an aspect of a “text.” While essays analyzing a short story, poem, or book are most common, a “text” can be almost anything we can look at critically: a movie, a piece of artwork, a website, etc. The thesis statement for an analytical essay should present the text you will be analyzing, state your claim/argument about that text, and preview the evidence from the text that you will use to support your claim/argument.

Prompt: What do the female characters featured in *Beowulf* show us about the perception of women in Anglo-Saxon society?

Thesis: In its celebration of the characters Wealhtheow and Hygd and vilification of women like Modthryth, *Beowulf* shows us that dutiful, married women were valued in Anglo-Saxon society more than independent, unmarried women.

This thesis presents the argument/claim to answer the question of *what* female character portrayal in the text says about the Anglo-Saxons' perception of women: "*Beowulf* shows us that dutiful, married women were valued in Anglo-Saxon society more than independent, unmarried women." And it previews the student's main points on *how* the text shows: "in its celebration of the characters Wealhtheow and Hygd and vilification of women like Modthryth."

Create Your Thesis

Write your prompt as a question: _____

This prompt is asking me to: Inform Argue Analyze

My subject/topic: _____

My supporting points:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

My thesis: _____

Does my thesis answer the prompt question above? Yes No

- If you answered yes, congratulations! You've created your thesis!
- If you answered no, try revising your statement until it answers the question above. Writing tutors can help with each step of this process!