

Student Handout 7

Notes and Questions

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement:

- tells the reader your position on the importance of the subject matter.
- tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.
- directly answers the question asked of you.
- usually is a single sentence somewhere in your first paragraph.

How do I develop a thesis?

A thesis is the result of a lengthy thinking process. Formulating a thesis is not the first thing you do after reading a writing prompt. Before you develop an argument on any topic, you have to collect and organize evidence, look for possible relationships between known facts (such as similarities or differences), and think about the significance of these relationships.

How do I know if my thesis is strong?

To determine if your thesis is strong, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I answer the question?
- Have I taken a position that others might challenge?
- Does my thesis do more than just provide a fact?
- Is my thesis specific rather than vague or general?

If you answer “yes” to all of the above questions, then you have a strong thesis sentence. If your answer is “no” to any of the above questions, then you need to revise your thesis sentence.

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Thesis Sentence Overview

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Sample

Prompt:

Compare the reasons why the North and South fought the Civil War.

Sample 1: The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different.

This weak thesis restates the question without providing any additional information or taking a position which may be challenged. Also, this thesis is too general and vague.

Sample 2: While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions.

Now we have a working thesis! Included in this working thesis is a reason for the war and some idea on how the two sides disagreed. The thesis has a stated position, is narrow and specific, and informs the reader what to expect the rest of the paper.

Practice

Create your own thesis sentence based on the prompt below. This will serve as a draft.

Prompt:

Compare the Magna Carta to two of the following documents. Evaluate how each document established or extended the democratic ideals of self-government and individual liberty.

- a. English Bill of Rights
or
U.S. Bill of Rights
- b. Declaration of Independence
or
Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen
