

## THESIS STATEMENTS IN LITERARY ANALYSIS PAPERS

\*The thesis statement is one of the (if not the) most important parts of your paper—think of it as the foundation of a house—if your foundation is weak and poorly constructed, what do you think happens to the house?

\*The thesis statement is the announcement of your analytical argument that you intend to make and prove in the duration of your paper. It is a road map for the paper—it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.

\*It should be placed somewhere in the Introduction of your paper—Many like to put it as the last sentence(s) of their Intro which is fine.

\*Successful thesis statements provoke thought and should read beautifully.

\*Your thesis statement should include two parts: WHAT and WHY.

\*WHAT: What claim are you making about the text?

\*WHY: Why should we care? Why is your claim important? Your thesis should answer the “so what?” question.

\*A thesis statement is usually, but can be more than, one sentence long.

Examples of Literary Thesis Statements:

\* “Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn is a great American novel.”

\*What’s wrong with this thesis statement?

\*An opinion about the book, not an argument.

\* “In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore.”

\*Better? How so? What is still missing?

\*Doesn’t answer the “so what?” question—what is the point of the contrast? What does the contrast signify?

\* “Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain’s Huckleberry Finn suggests that to find the true expression of American ideals, one must leave ‘civilized’ society and go back to nature.”

\*Even better?

\*It presents an interpretation of a literary work based on an analysis of its content and answers the “so what” question.

\* “Edgar Allan Poe’s work was affected greatly by the current events of his life, covering his family life, his childhood, and his career; these events changed his style and subject of his works.”

\*What’s wrong with this thesis statement?

\*More questions than answers: which works will be explored? What current events? What childhood or career events? How did Poe’s style change and WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

\* “There is a lot of symbolism in The Scarlet Letter.”

\*Bad? Why?

\* “Hawthorne’s use of symbolism in The Scarlet Letter falters and ultimately breaks down with the introduction of the character Pearl.”

\*Better? Why?

\* “The character of Ben in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman is a great [or important, or crucial, or unforgettable, etc.] character.”

\*What’s wrong with this thesis?

\*This does not say enough to serve as the basis for an essay. Besides, each of these judgments is entirely a matter of personal opinion because none of them define the criteria by which the judgment is being made.

\* “Through Paul’s experience behind the lines, at a Russian prisoner of war camp, and especially under bombardment in the trenches Erich Maria Remarque realistically shows how war dehumanizes a man.”

\*What can we anticipate that the author of this thesis will prove to us in the rest of the paper?

### **More Help for Thesis statement**

An argumentative paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. The claim could be an opinion, a policy proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation. The

goal of the argumentative paper is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided.

- Your thesis statement should be specific—it should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence.
- The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of a paper.
- Your topic may change as you write, so you may need to revise your thesis statement to reflect exactly what you have discussed in the paper.

A thesis statement is an assertion, not a statement of fact or an observation.

- Fact or observation: People use many lawn chemicals.
- Thesis: People are poisoning the environment with chemicals merely to keep their lawns clean.

A thesis statement is "a basic argument" that clearly articulates what the thesis or is expected to demonstrate