

## Tips for Writing a Thesis Statement

### Characteristics of a thesis sentence

- It is a sentence.
- It names the topic of your paper and contains an interpretive statement about your topic—in other words, you are saying something about the topic that is an opinion-based statement about the meaning of the work.
- It is debatable—it is not merely factual or obvious but requires convincing proof of its validity. A factual statement is established by data or simply reflects the facts of the work (such as plot). An obvious statement is an idea that anyone who reads the work would agree with; its validity has been established by general consensus and requires no additional proof.
- It is specific—it is expressed in language that focuses on one or more particular aspects of the work rather than a generality.
- It controls everything that goes into your paper (also known as the “controlling idea.”)

### The thesis of an essay is expressed in a declarative sentence, not a question

**NOT:** Who is the protagonist of *The Crucible*?

**BUT:** The real protagonist of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* is not an individual but the town of Salem.

### The thesis of a literary essay makes an assertion (an opinion-based interpretive statement) about the topic of the essay.

**NOT:** *Huckleberry Finn* is a great American novel.

**BUT:** The greatness of *Huckleberry Finn* lies in its expression of American democratic ideals through contrasting life on the river to life on the shore.

### The thesis of a literary essay is debatable rather than factual

**NOT:** *Lord of the Flies* is a book about a group of boys stranded on an island.

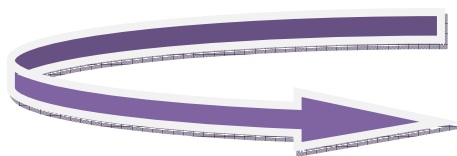
**BUT:** In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding uses a group of boys stranded on an island to reveal the true savage nature of humankind.

### The thesis of a literary essay targets a specific rather than a general aspect of its topic.

**NOT:** *Romeo and Juliet* is a play about impulsive love.

**BUT:** *Romeo and Juliet* demonstrates the effects of impulsivity on the two lovers and the families who mourn them.

flip over for more helpful hints...



# Patterns for Thesis Statements in Literary Essays

## 1. Analysis

**What it does:** separates a topic into its individual parts, examines the parts, and shows how the parts relate to the whole

**Answers the question:** How does understanding this part [section(s), character(s), symbol(s), image(s)] help me to understand the whole work?

**Example:** The meeting scenes in *Lord of the Flies* dramatize the three major conflicts in the novel, man vs. society, man vs. himself, and man vs. man.

## 2. Cause and Effect

**What it does:** explains how or why something happens or exists, or identifies what may have led up to something, or shows what the result of something is

**Answers the questions:** What are the causes of this situation? What are the results of this situation?

**Example:** *To Kill a Mockingbird* explores the social, political, and psychological effects of discrimination.

## 3. Comparison/Contrast

**What it does:** shows how two things are alike and why this is significant or shows how two things are different and why this is significant

**Answers the questions:** In what ways is X similar to Y? In what ways is X different from Y? Why is this important?

**Example:** Abigail Williams and John Proctor are well-matched antagonists because both are emotional, rebellious, and stubborn.

## 4. Key Concept

**What it does:** identifies and explains how an important idea functions in the work

**Answers the questions:** What is an important idea in this work? How does the author develop it?

**Example:** In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the killing of Tom Robinson develops the theme that justice and fairness can be conflicting concepts in a discriminating society.

## 5. Literary Technique

**What it does:** isolates one or two literary devices used by the author and explains how they function in the work

**Answers the questions:** What important literary device does the author use in this work? What is its function?

**Example:** In "The Pit and Pendulum" Poe uses suspense and irony to show how a man's fate is influenced by a combination of intellect and luck

## 6. Refuting an Accepted Idea

**What it does:** argues against a traditional or commonly held idea about a literary work or reveals a different cause/effect than is generally accepted

**Answers the question:** Why is this common assertion incorrect?

**Example:** Although John Proctor is generally held to be the "hero" of *The Crucible*, the town of Salem is actually the play's protagonist.