Writing a Thesis

What is a thesis?

Your thesis is the central argument of your essay, the claim that your essay will support with evidence. If the assignment asks a question, the thesis is the answer. It should be stated in a single sentence, called the thesis statement, in your introduction.

How do I write a GOOD thesis?

Conduct initial research of your topic with the goal of forming a specific, detailed opinion about it. Then state your opinion as an argument without saying “I think.” For example,

Hitler’s greatest strategic mistake was to break his pact with Stalin and invade Russia, which caused the Soviet Union to join the Allies, and ultimately led to Germany’s defeat.

or

Despite the strategic boldness Macbeth shows in targeting women and children, these attacks reveal he is a weak man, obsessed with who will inherit his throne, and so cowardly that he fears children.

DON’T write a thesis that states a universally held opinion. Instead, test that your thesis is an argument someone else could disagree with, so you will have to prove your case. Examples of weak theses that are universally held opinions:

Germany lost World War II because of the superior strength and strategy of the Allied forces.

or

Macbeth’s attacks on women and children show how ruthless he is.

Although these thesis statements are opinions, no reasonable person would argue against either of them, so they’re both essentially pointless.

DON’T write a thesis that is a statement of fact or a summary of events. Examples of weak theses that are statement of facts:

Germany ultimately lost to the Allied forces in World War II.

Besides all the grown men he murders, Macbeth is responsible for attacks on women and children.

DO write a thesis sentence that lays out an attack plan for your essay. An attack plan highlights the main ideas that support your argument, and makes your thesis more specific. Example of a thesis with an attack plan:

While the messages of the Oracle at Delphi sometimes supported democracy and sometimes favored tyrants, they consistently supported colonization.

This essay will be organized by three main ideas: democracy, tyrants, and colonization.
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Standard thesis templates

- Odysseus is not a hero because he is too ________, he always _________, and he ________.
- The play employs three tactics to reveal the prince’s character: ________, ________, and __________.
- The sonnet’s message about _________ is ambiguous; on the one hand it acknowledges __________, but on the other hand it suggests ________________.
- Despite ______________, Lady Macbeth is ____________ because she ________________, ________________, and ________________.
- George Washington’s _____________ and his use of _____________ enabled him to ________________.
- The Industrial Revolution occurred when it did because ______________ and ______________.
- Rome had a better economy than Greece because of its ________________, ________________, and ________________.
- X’s view that ______________ is wrong because ________________.

Checklist for a GOOD thesis

It answers the essay question fully (if your teacher gave you one).

It makes a specific argument.

It makes an argument that a reasonable person could disagree with.

It is an opinion stated as an assertion without saying “I think” or “In my opinion.”

It is stated in one sentence (two at the most).

It can be supported with evidence.