
LITERARY ANALYSIS THESIS STATEMENTS

- A thesis in a literary analysis or literary research paper can take many forms.
- 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 introductory paragraph which is fine. A thesis statement is usually, but can be more than, one sentence long.
- 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.

SAMPLE THESIS STATEMENTS

These sample thesis statements are provided as guides, not as required forms or prescriptions.

#1 The thesis may focus on an analysis of one of the elements of fiction, drama, poetry or nonfiction as expressed in the work: character, plot, structure, idea, theme, symbol, style, imagery, tone, etc.

Example:

In “A Worn Path,” Eudora Welty creates a fictional character in Phoenix Jackson whose determination, faith, and cunning illustrate the indomitable human spirit.

Note that the work, author, and character to be analyzed are identified in this thesis statement. The thesis relies on a strong verb (*creates*). It also identifies the element of fiction that the writer will explore (*character*) and the characteristics the writer will analyze and discuss (*determination, faith, cunning*).

Further Examples:

The character of the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, who serves as a foil to young Juliet, delights the reader with her warmth and earthy wit, and helps realize the tragic catastrophe.

The works of ecstatic love poets Rumi, Hafiz, and Kabir use symbols such as a lover’s longing and the Tavern of Ruin to illustrate the human soul’s desire to connect with God.

#2 The thesis may focus on illustrating how a work reflects the particular genre's forms, the characteristics of a philosophy of literature, or the ideas of a particular school of thought.

Example:

“The Third and Final Continent” exhibits characteristics recurrent in writings by immigrants: tradition, adaptation, and identity.

Note how the thesis statement classifies the form of the work (*writings by immigrants*) and identifies the characteristics of that form of writing (*tradition, adaptation, and identity*) that the essay will discuss.

Further examples:

Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* reflects characteristics of Theatre of the Absurd in its minimalist stage setting, its seemingly meaningless dialogue, and its apocalyptic or nihilist vision.

A close look at many details in “The Story of an Hour” reveals how language, institutions, and expected demeanor suppress the natural desires and aspirations of women.

#3 The thesis may draw parallels between some element in the work and real-life situations or subject matter: historical events, the author’s life, medical diagnoses, etc.

Example:

In Willa Cather’s short story, “Paul’s Case,” Paul exhibits suicidal behavior that a caring adult might have recognized and remedied had that adult had the scientific knowledge we have today.

This thesis suggests that the essay will identify characteristics of suicide that Paul exhibits in the story. The writer will have to research medical and psychology texts to determine the typical characteristics of suicidal behavior and to illustrate how Paul’s behavior mirrors those characteristics.

Further Examples:

Through the experience of one man, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, accurately depicts the historical record of slave life in its descriptions of the often brutal and quixotic relationship between master and slave and of the fragmentation of slave families.

In “I Stand Here Ironing,” one can draw parallels between the narrator’s situation and the author’s life experiences as a mother, writer, and feminist.