



Division of
Academic Enhancement
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



PLaTO
Peer Learning *and* Teaching Others

Top 5 Tips for Writing a Great Thesis Statement



Top 5 Tips for Writing a Great Thesis Statement

1) Know Your Prompt

Before you can ever start writing your thesis statement, you need to make sure that you understand what the assignment is asking you to do. For many classes, your prompt or assignment description can be several paragraphs long, so you want to make sure you have a clear understanding of what is being asked of you before you start crafting your thesis statement.

Ask Yourself:

- What questions am I being asked to answer?
- What are some potential arguments I could make?
- What kind of paper does my professor want to read?

Example:

This is the prompt from an assignment in the American Literature survey course: *Choose one particular “American Value” (that could be a positive value or a negative one) and trace its development in two or three works. While you could do one of the prominent American values (e.g. individualism, piety, materialism) you could also consider a less obvious one that may have personal significance for you.*

Based on this prompt, your thesis must include:

- Naming one American value
- Making a judgement (positive, negative, etc.) about that value
- Incorporating two or three different texts used throughout the course

This was an example of an introductory paragraph for the paper (the thesis is bold):

Undeniably, one of the core defining “American values” is independence; both on a national and individual scale Americans are dedicated to the idea of self-government, and the freedom of choice. In direct conflict with this value, however, existed the cult of domesticity and strict gender roles which kept female citizens permanently dependent on their fathers and husbands. Men like Walt Whitman were able to make bold claims to their independence and individuality: “I exist as I am, and that is enough,” but these claims existed in a decidedly male context (Whitman 37). Female independence exercised itself in much more subtle ways- not in the grand declarations of a man standing alone on a mountain, but in a quiet rebellion within the confines that society forced upon them. **“A New England Nun” by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and**



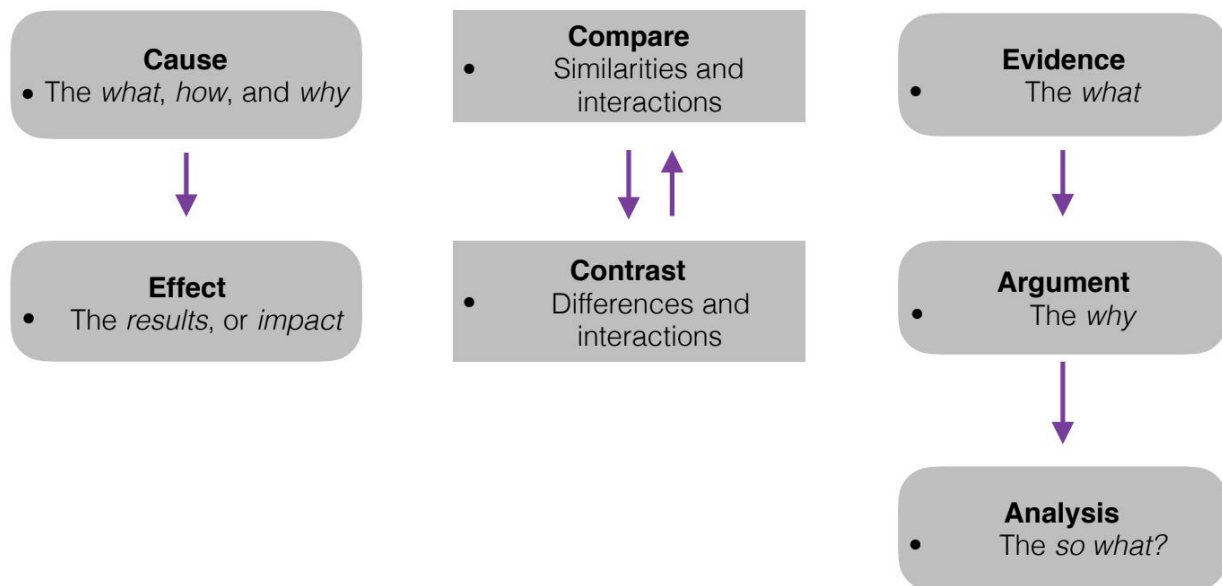
“Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin are two short stories where the female protagonist is able to develop a sense of personal independence within the boundaries of a traditionally feminine role.

2) Determine the structure of your paper

The structure of your paper will determine the number of claims or arguments that you have and therefore, the structure of your thesis.

There are many different types of papers:

- Cause and effect (or problem, cause, solution for more argumentative writing)
- Compare and contrast
- Chronological, which shows a change over time.
- Categorical, break your claims up into specific categories— each claim will have evidence, argument, and analysis.



3.) Make an outline

You might be asking yourself: hang on, don't I need a thesis statement before I can start making an outline? And the answer to that is NO! I've found that using pre-writing strategies such as outlining can help you realize a stronger thesis. An outline is great way to test whether a partially drafted thesis will "hold up" while you're writing your paper. This is also a good step to take if you are unsure of whether you've answered the entire prompt. If you are unable to use your thesis to make an effective



Division of
Academic Enhancement
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



PLaTO
Peer Learning *and* Teaching Others

outline, chances are that your argument is not strong enough to support an entire paper. If that is the case, it's time to go back to tip number one and re-examine the prompt.



4.) Parallelism

Parallel structure, or parallelism, means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more words or ideas are of equal importance. Words and phrases should not only match in structure, but also in tense.

Good: Effective group work is a result of cooperation, communication, and organization.

Bad: Effective group work is a result of cooperation, communication, and being organized.

The claim “being organized” is not in parallel structure because it is not in noun form like the other two claims: cooperation and communication.

You want to make sure that your thesis follows a parallel structure so that your reader can clearly identify your arguments.

5.) Office hours

Before you start writing your paper, take your thesis statement to your professor’s office hours and ask for feedback. If you are completely off track, it is a lot easier to get help before you go ahead and write the entire paper.

This might seem like a lot to consider when crafting one or two sentences, but it is incredibly important. Your thesis is the foundation of your entire paper, and if you can start out strong the rest of your writing will come that much easier. Good luck and happy writing!