Writing a Thesis
for a critical analysis paper

5 QUICK TIPS

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The Thesis

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The Thesis

What is the purpose of the Thesis and what information does it contain?

The Thesis is:

- A conclusive statement of an argument.
- A response to a debatable question.
- A proposition that asserts and claims what your paper will support.

The Thesis also:

- Uncovers the author's intentions.
- Focuses on larger issues: wider themes that speak to the ideas behind the text.
- Interrogates the author's text and ideas.
- Builds into it's content a summary of the direction in which the argument is going.
- Presumes that the author has shaped characters, made decisions about plot and is trying to carry through some ideas.

The Thesis is NOT:

- Exploratory, it is a conclusive statement made after assessing the meaning of the work.
- A debate with the characters in the work.
- Defined by a specific number of sentences.
- Merely an observation of the text.
What is the **AUTHOR** saying? What is the **AUTHOR** thinking? How does the **AUTHOR** say it? Why does the **AUTHOR** say it in that way?

A critical analysis paper is about trying to come to an understanding of what the **AUTHOR** is seeking to convey, or what the text seems to convey about the **AUTHOR'S** ideas.

Read some Literary Criticism papers before you begin, identify the 'question' the 'thesis' and the writer's 'analysis' of the **AUTHOR's** work.

Search for your author, or the title of the work in the following databases (Databases by Title)

- Academic Search Primier
Pay attention to how the writer discusses the AUTHOR'S ideas. Remember you are discussing the AUTHOR'S ideas and how the AUTHOR conveys the ideas.
Begin With A Conclusion

- Write your paper based on an idea or question (derived from the text) that you find interesting and want to explore.
- Make some closing conclusive remark that will justify the journey you have taken.
- Take this statement from the end of the essay and place it at the beginning of the essay as your thesis.
- Begin to re-write the essay with the intention of trying to prove (with evidence from the text), that your assertions are accurate.

Remember you are discussing the AUTHOR'S ideas and how the AUTHOR conveys the ideas.

Example

The symbol in the text that interests you.

'Bright clear blue sky on the day of the funeral'
Write a paper on why you think this occurred, what the AUTHOR may have been thinking, what the author was trying to say. Maybe the author used a 'bright blue sky' to act as a counter point to the sorrow of the funeral. Maybe the author uses other 'happy' things in contrast with painful experiences to make a certain point.

Your Conclusion

You conclude that the AUTHOR shows that the world is callous and unfeeling, and goes on regardless of
what is happening to individuals at a particular time and place.

Your 'working' thesis.

"The AUTHOR uses nature to present an existential view of the world--to argue that the world is callous and unfeeling and that people have to survive in such a horrid place."

You can now rewrite your essay, using your 'working' thesis. Your paper should provide evidence from the text proving that your thesis is accurate. Re-read your paper, and REVISE your thesis as needed.
Begin With A Question

Construct a good question.

- Ask a question that is debatable.*
- Ask about how and why the AUTHOR makes certain decisions in character, text and symbols.
- Ask about the AUTHOR'S attitudes and beliefs.

State your response to the AUTHOR'S views and writing.

- Do you agree or disagree with the author or other critics?
- Do you have an answer to the question?
- Justify your response or explain your answer.

Summarize some evidence from the text that supports your response.

Remember you are discussing the AUTHOR'S ideas and how the AUTHOR conveys the ideas.

Example

Question

Richard Wright shows a certain level of chauvinism and misogyny in his work. Do you agree with this accusation?
Your Answer

Yes. Richard Wright diminishes women to promote the black male.

Justify your Answer- How does he do this?

In his unfair portrayal of Sara and other female characters in "Long Black Song".

Working Thesis

In ‘Long Black Song’, Richard Wright's unfair portrayal of Sara reveals a tendency towards misogyny and chauvinism. His female characters are constantly disruptive, sexually promiscuous and always destroying the lives of the men they care about. Wright offers very few positive traits in his work. Ultimately, he diminishes women to promote the black male.

Debatable or Not?

"These shoes are black." (observation)

"I like black shoes." (Opinion/observation)

"Black shoes are the best shoes." (debatable--potential thesis)

A thesis does not state the obvious. The obvious is proven by mere observation. If your thesis is an observation, your essay will be simply a retelling of the work.
Think of the thesis like the opening statement in a Court of Law.

- State your conclusion as fact.
- Explain your conclusion.
- Summarize your evidence and how you will use it.
- Restate your conclusion.

Remember you are discussing the AUTHOR'S ideas and how the AUTHOR conveys the ideas.

**Example**

State your conclusion

"Your honor, Betty Wright is innocent. She did kill her husband, but she did so in self defense.

Explain your conclusion

He attacked her. So she was forced to act and she killed him.

Summarize the Evidence

I will present evidence to show that Betty Wright had suffered abuse for years at the hands of this man. I will prove that he was far bigger than her and that she acted in self defense because she feared for her life.
Restate your conclusion

The fact is that she did not murder this man. She was saving her own life.
Revise Your Thesis

Is your Thesis:-

- A conclusive statement of an argument.
- A response to a debatable question.
- A proposition that asserts and claims what your paper will support.

Does your Thesis also:-

- Uncover the AUTHOR'S intentions.
- Focus on larger issues:- wider themes that speak to the ideas behind the text.
- Interrogate the AUTHOR’S text and ideas.
- Build into it's content a summary of the direction in which the argument is going.
- Presume that the AUTHOR has shaped characters, made decisions about plot and is trying to carry through some ideas.

Have you edited your Thesis?

The thesis is not finalized until you have finished writing the paper.

What should you do now?
• You may have to rework your thesis after you have discovered new information or changed your opinion,
• You may have to re-write your thesis to address more specific issues presented in your essay.
• Ask a friend to read your thesis for clarity, and to see if they understand what your paper is about after reading the thesis.
The only way to strengthen your thesis writing is to practice thesis writing.

- Write a list of questions.
- Write a thesis for each question.

You don't have to know the text to create a thesis about it. It is a matter of reading the question, digging out the point of contention and then giving it shape in the form of a thesis.

The skill of knowing how to to write a good thesis will be valuable to you in any field that you might be in. It is all about making a case.
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