Creating a Thesis Statement: A Few Simple Tips

What is a thesis and what should it accomplish?

A thesis must always demonstrate an argument. If you are not trying to prove something and persuade your audience to accept your point of view, you are not writing an academic paper.

Your thesis is the most concise way of indicating to your audience the intention of your paper.

For most undergraduate writing, it is sufficient to have a one sentence thesis statement. Your introductory paragraph should build up to your thesis statement and provide your reader with the necessary context.

Creating a thesis statement

Suppose this is the prompt of a paper that you are assigned to write:

Describe the nature of womanhood in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast and The Little Mermaid. How do the roles of the female protagonists differ? How are they similar?

So how should you approach this question?

1) You must first identify the concepts that this prompt is asking you to identify. Often, you will be asked to analyze particular characters, texts, or themes. This prompt is asking you to make conclusions about the female protagonists in these films. Before you begin writing, you might want to make a list of attributes specific to each character (or text/ theme.) This will help you identify commonalities or disparities that may be useful in helping you determine your thesis.

Belle (from Beauty and the Beast)
- lives with her father in a town in France
- is not superficial (falls in love with a beast at the end of the film)
- is beautiful but greatest passion is reading
- brave and curious

Ariel (from The Little Mermaid)
- sacrifices her voice for legs
- rebellious, curious, and headstrong
- lives with her father under the ocean
- falls in love “at first sight” with a prince that she rescues at the beginning of the film
2) Now you can begin to analyze the significance of these attributes. Since this is a prompt based on comparison, it might be tempting to simply list off the similar/differing attributes. This is an academic essay, however, so your paper must have an argument. A sentence like “Belle is fond of reading, yet Ariel is not” would not function as a thesis statement, because you are stating a fact, not making an argument.

3) In order to fully analyze this prompt, you must identify the concepts that warrant further explanation. For instance, both Belle and Ariel live with their father. Where, then, are their mothers? Since this prompt is about the nature of womanhood in these films, the absence of a mother figure might be worth mentioning. What about each character’s respective attitudes toward relationships? There is an obvious difference here: Belle falls in love with an ugly beast at the end of the film, yet Ariel is instantly—perhaps superficially—in love with a very handsome prince. By simply identifying these two attributes, it is possible to create a thesis statement:

Although both Belle and Ariel project the consequences of an absent mother figure, Belle ultimately emerges as a more admirable model of femininity because she rejects superficiality and stereotypical romantic conventions.

This thesis gives you the opportunity to discuss the impact that the lack of a mother might have on both characters (for instance their shared insatiable curiosity and tendency to take risks.) It also gives you the opportunity to form an argument on who you view as the more “admirable” model of womanhood, and the differences in how each character approaches their respective romantic relationships. There are many other theses that could be created from this particular example, but this is one that demonstrates a clear, coherent argument and fully addresses all aspects of the prompt.

Additional tips for creating a thesis statement

In the preliminary stages of drafting your thesis, it may be helpful for you to write the phrase “I intend to argue that ___________” and fill in the blank with your potential statement. This will help you understand when you are making an argument, as opposed to simply articulating a fact.

A simple thesis is often the best thesis. Remember: you do not need to include every aspect of your argument in your thesis. Be direct and concise.

It can often be helpful to begin your thesis statement with a “therefore” or “although.” This helps your reader identify that an important transition is taking place.