

Lesson 2

The Thesis Sentence

The thesis sentence is the most important sentence in any essay. It must be clear, properly structured, and in the correct place.

A thesis sentence is. . .

- A single
- Declaratory sentence
- That “answers” the prompt
- With a clearly and simply stated opinion
- That does not restate the prompt.

Tip #1

- After reading the whole prompt, marking the verbs and conjunctions, and sketching out how you intend to proceed. . .
- Answer the prompt in a simple sentence.
- For instance, consider this DBQ prompt:
 - How successful was organized labor in improving the position of workers in the period from 1875 to 1900? Analyze the factors that contributed to the level of success achieved.

Tip #1 (continued)

- What do you think about this prompt?
 - Were labor unions successful in improving working conditions and the power of working people during this time?
 - At the end of the period had the lives of working people substantially improved due to organized labor?
 - What factors caused or stopped improvement from happening?
- YOUR OPINION IS ESSENTIAL!
- And your opinion must be clear.
- So. . .

Tip #1 (continued)

- Let's say that you think this time period was not a period of labor success.
- Write a simple statement that answers the prompt with your opinion. Like this. . .
 - Labor unions failed to improve the condition of working people at the end of the 19th century.
- Or. . .
 - Government antagonism to labor unions kept them from effectively helping working people during this period.

Tip #1 (continued)

- It's extremely important to get your thinking clearly into a simple “answer” to the prompt.
- Do NOT restate the wording of the prompt.
 - Rather than “the time period 1875 to 1900,” write “the last decades of the 19th century” or “the three decades following the Civil War.”
 - Rather than “organized labor,” refer to labor unions.

Choosing a thesis structure

- The key to writing a clear, strong thesis is to “answer” or address the prompt with your opinion clearly in front of you.
- They you need to decide what shape your thesis sentence should take.
- Your thesis will provide the reader’s first and guiding impression. Give great care with this sentence!

Choosing a thesis structure (continued)

Two excellent ways of writing thesis sentences are

1. A concept thesis.
2. An organizational thesis.

Sometimes this last is known as an organizational statement.

Concept Thesis

- Now that you have your opinion, you can write a sentence that is both complex and specific.
- *One way* of doing this is to write a sentence that begins with the word “although.”
- This may seem odd, but recent AP grading rubrics award high scores only to essays that “address the complexity of the question.”

Concept Thesis (continued)

- A thesis written like this may look like this:
 - Although this was a period of intense labor pressure, unions failed to make the lives and status of workers better.
- Or...
 - Although this period saw increased labor involvement, state and federal government antagonism kept unions from being effective.

Concept Thesis (continued)

- This kind of thesis sentence sets you up from the very beginning to acknowledge “complexity” in the essay prompt.
- Your opinion, your “answer” to the prompt, goes in the second half of this thesis, after the comma. This is the point you are going to make, the destination at which you want the reader to arrive.

Organizational Thesis

- Another way of writing a clear thesis is to use an “organizational statement.”
- This is a sentence that specifically mentions what will be the topics of the following body paragraphs.
- Look at the prompt one more time:
 - How successful was organized labor in improving the position of workers in the period from 1875 to 1900? Analyze the factors that contributed to the level of success achieved.

Organizational Thesis (continued)

- Some essay prompts lend themselves to organizational thesis sentences. For instance, consider the following prompt:
 - Analyze the factors that contributed to the success or failure of organized labor's efforts to improve the position of workers during the period 1875 to 1900.
- An organizational thesis for this prompt could specify which three things were going to be discussed without re-stating the prompt.

Organizational Thesis (continued)

- The following sentences specifically mention what will be the topic sentences of the next paragraphs.
 - Labor unions failed because they were confused in their goals and were aggressively opposed by both state and federal governments.
 - Organized labor unions were unsuccessful because they were not unified in their demands and were associated with radical European political groups.

Whether you choose a concept thesis or an organizational thesis, this sentence will shape the first impression you make on the reader.

Think carefully about your task and make sure your thesis addresses the prompt.

Tip #3

- Having written your thesis sentence, you are ready to put it into your essay introduction. For most AP U. S. History essays, an introduction “paragraph” may only be two or three sentences in length.
- The thesis sentence should be the last sentence in your introduction paragraph.
- Take a step back from your thesis and write a general sentence that introduces the topic.

Tip #3 (continued)

- The general topic of this prompt is the effectiveness of organized labor.
- Using a **concept thesis** sentence, the introduction might look like this:
 - American workers have organized to improve pay and working conditions since the earliest period of industrialization. By the end of the 19th century these unions made a major effort to make the lives of working people better. Although this was a period of intense labor pressure, unions failed to make the lives and status of workers better.

Tip #3 (continued)

- Using an **organizational thesis** sentences, the introduction might look like this:
 - American workers have organized to improve pay and working conditions since the earliest period of industrialization. By the end of the 19th century these unions made a major effort to make the lives of working people better. They failed, however, since they were unclear in their demands and both state and federal governments used force to stop them.

Tip #3 (continued)

- AP essay rubrics award high scores to essays that have “a clear, well-developed thesis” that is “focused on the prompt” and “guides the essay throughout.”
- By clearly “answering” the prompt with your opinion, writing a strong thesis sentence, and putting it at the beginning of your essay, you do as much in two or three sentences as you can do to get yourself off to a great start.

Lesson 2 Summary

- A thesis is a single declarative sentence that “answers” the prompt with your opinion.
- The thesis should address the complexity in the prompt.
- The thesis should be carefully crafted to fit the demands of the specific essay prompt.
- The thesis should be the last sentence in the introduction paragraph.