

# Writing Tips for Analytical Writing

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## Thesis Statements

A thesis statement allows you to synthesize your ideas & assert a stance that leads to literary analysis rather than summary.

**A delineated thesis statement** lists your key points. The delineated thesis will help create the structure for your topic sentences. This is a good strategy to start with for writers who struggle with organization and planning. Once writers gain more independence, develop organization, demonstrate higher level analysis, and gain familiarity with literary devices, symbolism, and satire, they can construct a more sophisticated thesis.

For example: *Beowulf is most justified to engage in battle to prove his bravery, eliminate the Geats' suffering, and earn glory for the after life.*

\*Notice how this delineated thesis lists the reasons and this sequence will dictate the order of the body paragraphs that support the argument

**A non-delineated thesis statement:** This thesis statement asserts an argument but does not dictate 3 specific reasons. It provokes an argument that will require further organization & a progression of evidence in supporting body paragraphs.

**Example #1:** *Macbeth transforms from a celebrated hero to a draconian and sadistic leader as his tragic flaw of corrupt ambition consumes him.*

\*Notice this non-delineated thesis establishes how Macbeth changes and clearly takes a stance that it is due to his one tragic flaw of ambition. The writer will now have to demonstrate analysis to show a progression of evidence of how and why corrupt ambition changes Macbeth. The writer identified Macbeth's tragic flaw, which means the paper will continue to emphasize Macbeth as accountable for his actions rather than other characters.

**Example #2:** *Chaucer uses satire in the Wife of Bath's Tale to exaggerate a women's ability to control men in attempt to mock stereotypical gender roles and achieve equality for women.*

\*Notice this non-delineated thesis establishes author's intent. This writer identifies satire as a key literary device to explain the author's message and purpose. The body paragraphs will use persuasive topic sentences to prove the premise of the thesis statement.

## **A Thesis Statement Must be C-L-E-A-R**

Contestable

Logical

Engaging

Articulate

Reflective to provoke analysis

## **Brainstorming Your Thesis**

- Always review the prompt (if one is provided by the teacher) before constructing a thesis statement.
- If 2 prompts are provided, write a thesis statement for both & evaluate which one is stronger. Which one can you provide the most evidence & analysis to support?
- It is always helpful to review key quotes from the literature when thinking about your thesis. Your annotations are a good place to start!
- Ask yourself...what was the author's intent in writing this novel or play? What lesson does the author try to convey? How does the author teach this lesson?
- When you examine Why? How? questions as opposed to Who? or What happened? you will delve deeper into the literature and be able to construct a thesis statement that leads to analysis.

## **Attributes of a Good Thesis Statement**

- It should be contestable, proposing an arguable point with which people could reasonably disagree. A strong thesis is provocative; it takes a stand and justifies the discussion you will present.
- It is specific and focused.
- It clearly asserts your own conclusion based on evidence. Note: Be flexible. The evidence may lead you to a conclusion you didn't think you'd reach. It is perfectly okay to change your thesis!
- It provides the reader with a map to guide him/her through your work.
- It avoids vague language (like "it seems").
- It avoids the first person. ("I believe," "In my opinion")
- It should pass the "so what" or "who cares" test. For instance, "People should avoid driving under the influence of alcohol," would be unlikely to evoke any opposition.

### ***Simple equations for a thesis might look something like this:***

Specific topic + Attitude/Angle/Argument = Thesis

What you plan to argue + How you plan to argue it = Thesis

## **Do You Have A Good Thesis Statement?**

### ***Try these 5 tests:***

1. Does the thesis inspire a reasonable reader to ask, "How?" or "Why?"
2. Would a reasonable reader NOT respond with "Duh!" or "So what?" or "Gee, no kidding!" or "Who cares?"
3. Does the thesis avoid general phrasing and/or sweeping words such as "all" or "none" or "every"?
4. Does the thesis lead the reader toward the topic sentences (the subtopics needed to prove the thesis)?
5. Can the thesis be adequately developed in the required length of the paper or project?

## BLENDING QUOTES

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A common fault of student papers is the absence of smooth transitions from text to quotation. It is not enough to weave quotations into your paper unless you always lead smoothly into the quotation. Consider the following references from a selection of short stories.

**Poor:** The following lacks an introduction to the quotation or has a weak one.

*The narrator's wife in "Cathedral" dealt with a sarcastic husband. "Maybe I could take him bowling" (Carver 457).*

This quote is from page 457 in Carver's story. "Maybe I could take him bowling." This shows that the narrator's wife in "Cathedral" had to deal with a sarcastic husband.

**Better:** The quotation is now more smoothly introduced, and its speaker is identified in the text.

*The narrator in "Cathedral" was insensitive and sarcastic towards his wife's friend. "Maybe I could take him bowling" (Carver 457).*

**BEST:** The quotation is smoothly introduced, the speaker is identified in the text, and the situation in which it is spoken is mentioned.

*The narrator in "Cathedral" was an insensitive person. When he learns that Robert, his wife's blind friend, is coming for an overnight visit, he sarcastically declares, "Maybe I could take him bowling" (Carver 457). His lack of sensitivity towards Robert is apparent since bowling is not likely an activity that a blind person engages in.*

Note that in the *best* example, the word "declares" is used instead of "says." It is easy to say "he said," but good writing style demands that you be more imaginative—and less repetitive—in introducing quotations. Use a dictionary or a thesaurus to help you. Here is a word bank you may find helpful!

### BLENDING QUOTES WORD BANK:

*\*Notice each row groups words according to meaning*

declares	asserts	announces	demands	persists	insists	proclaims	
stresses	emphasizes	demonstrates	avows	reinforces	asserts		
argues	contests	alleges	claims	contends	challenges		
regrets	apologizes	atones	repents				
discloses	reveals	confesses	divulges	unveils	publicizes		
confirms	affirms	accepts	reassures	commends	praises	applauds	concur
refutes	rejects	denies	recants	renounces			
acknowledges	recognizes	tolerates	grants	concedes	admits		
pleads	beseches	appeals	entreats	implores			
scolds	warns	retorts	complains	protests	objects	criticizes	

## ***IMPORTANT TIPS***

### **DO NOT...**

- use “I think” “I believe” [No I statements]/It’s a persuasive essay...we know it’s your opinion
- use YOU...never address the reader
- use the words ***get, gotten, things, something, kinda, whatever, stuff, very***
- use casual language and/or slang
- use trite expressions (ex: won the battle & lost the war, better safe than sorry)
- use “this quote shows”

### **Presentation of Quote**

“A quotation can be a single word or an entire paragraph. Choose quotations carefully, keep them as brief as possible, and use them only when they are interesting, revealing, or necessary in the development of your text. A paper that is quotation heavy usually means a writer has not done much independent thinking. When you do quote material directly, be sure that the capitalization, punctuation, and spelling are the same as that in the original work. Any changes you makes should be clearly marked for your readers” (184). \*This material was quoted and adapted from Writers Inc (184).

### **Short Quotations**

If a quotation is **three/four typed lines or fewer**, work it into the body of your paper and put quotation marks around it.

Blacker suggests, “I tell you what I’d do—I’d swap this electric train for one of your wafers—consecrated, mind. It’s got to be consecrated” (Greene 251).

### **Long Quotations**

Quotations of **more than three/four typed lines** should be set off from the rest of the writing by indenting each line 10 spaces and double-spacing the material. Do **not** use quotation marks. Generally a colon is used to introduce quotations set off from the text.

After the narrator brings home a cat to replace Pluto, he laments:  
I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipate; but —I know not how or why it was—its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed me. By slow degrees these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually—very gradually I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence. (Poe 140)

Caution! Long quotations should be used sparingly – if at all.

## **Partial Quotations**

If you want to leave out part of the quotation, use an ellipsis to signify the omission. An ellipsis (. . .) is three periods with a space before and after each one. (Note: Anything you take out of a quotation should not change the author's original meaning.)

The narrator states, "I soon found a dislike to it arising within me . . . I avoided the creature . . . Very gradually I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing . . ." (Poe 140).

## **Adding to Quotations**

Use brackets [like this] to signify any material you add within a quotation to help its meaning.

"He had put on his best black Sunday clothes and, as though he could never quite escape the smear of his profession [he was a baker], he had a dab of dried talcum on his cheek . . ." (Greene 252).

## **Quoting Dialogue – Or, Quoting a Quote**

We know to use single quotation marks when we want to quote a passage – easy! But, what if you must quote a passage that is inside another passage – that is, you are quoting a quote.

You follow this pattern of quotation marks (as crazy as it seems): *double, single, double*.

Kerry continued, "Then Sarah whispered, 'Don't forget the old saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again"' (Elliott 42).

*Yes, that is double, single, double at the end.*

## **How to Quote Dialogue Between Two People**

It looks and reads best when you *blend* the dialogue into your writing instead of quoting it directly in a block:

### **BEST (example of blending)**

*After not meeting for several years, John simply says "Hello" to Alan, as he notices him waiting on line at McDonald's. Full of surprise, Alan replies with "Hi, there," (Jonas 15) not really knowing what else to say.*

**AVOID (example of block)** – If you must write out the direct conversation between two people, you need to start a new line each time a different person speaks. Treat like a block quote.

*John and Alan have not spoken in several years after an angry confrontation. They unexpectedly meet in a McDonalds:*

*"Hello," said John.*

*"Hi, there," replied Alan. (Jonas 15)*

### **Quoting Shakespeare** (cited from: [www.colby.edu](http://www.colby.edu))

When quoting a Shakespearean play, your references at the end of your quotations should refer to Act, scene, and line numbers, not to page numbers.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom wishes to transform his experience into art: "I will Peter Quince to write a ballet of this dream. IT shall be called 'Bottom's Dream,' because it hath no bottom" (4.1.214-16).

In this reference, the quotation would come from Act 4, scene 1, lines 214-16.

If you are quoting more than three lines, you will need to indent your quotation. The lines should be arranged as they appear in the text if you are quoting verse and arranged as paragraph if you are quoting prose.

Richard ultimately recognizes how he has destroyed his own position:

...How sweet music is  
When time is broke, and no proportion kept.  
So is it in the music of men's lives:  
Here have I the daintiness of ear  
To check time broke in a disordered string,  
But for the concord of my state and time,  
Had not the ear to hear my true name broke.  
I wasted time, and now doth time waste me. (5.5.41-49)

### **Quoting Poetry** (cited from: [www.shepherd.edu](http://www.shepherd.edu))

The rules for poetry differ from the rules for quoting prose in two key ways:

- Poetry requires writers to cite line numbers not page numbers.
- Poetry requires writers to keep line breaks in tact.

#### Quoting 1, 2 or 3 lines of poetry.

You can quote three or fewer lines of poetry without having to place the lines in a block quote. Use quotation marks. Use a slash to indicate the break between lines. Put the line numbers in parentheses. Place the period at the end of the line number(s):.

Heaney directly compares poetry writing to the digging his ancestors did: "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it" (29-31).

#### Quoting 4 or more lines of poetry.

If you quote four or more lines of poetry, you need to block indent the poem ten spaces on the left margin.

The author, David Bottoms, is wise to the fact that men often use sports to communicate their feelings. The persona of the poem, however, takes years to realize his father's message. Once he realizes the importance of sports to their relationship, he sends a message back to his father:

and I never learned what you were laying down.  
Like a hand brushed across the bill of a cap,  
let this be the sign  
I'm getting a grip on the sacrifice. (20-23)

Do not use ellipses if you start quoting a poem midline. If you want to start quoting in the middle of a line of poetry, just add indentions to indicate the text is only a partial line. Do not use ellipses points ( . . ).

McDonald paints a picture of a family in pain, but he uses images that usually show up in cozier circumstances, such as children reading the comics:

At dawn  
we folded the quilts  
and funnies, crept softly  
through our chores. (13-16)

**When in doubt, what source can you refer to find the answers for your formatting issues?**

The Owl at Purdue Online Writing Lab – MLA Format  
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

\* Online source: Somers High School, Somers CT (with edits by Mrs. Dyrvik : )