

Thesis Statement Builder

Answer any Literature essay question in one strong sentence, then build every paragraph from it.

What is a thesis?

A thesis is your answer to the essay question in one sentence. It goes at the start of your essay, and every paragraph after it gives evidence for it. A good thesis is an argument that someone could disagree with.

The formula, in three steps

Securing	The writer presents [character or theme] as _____. Make a clear claim that uses the words of the question.
Strengthening	The writer presents [character or theme] as _____ in order to _____. Add the writer's purpose: what did they want the audience or reader to think, feel or do?
Soaring	The writer presents [character or theme] as _____, yet _____; in doing so, they _____. Add a complication or a change across the text, so your argument has somewhere to go.

From weak to strong

Question: How does Dickens present Scrooge as an outsider in A Christmas Carol?

Not yet a thesis	Scrooge is an outsider in A Christmas Carol. (A fact: nobody could disagree with it.)
Getting there	Dickens presents Scrooge as an outsider who shuts himself away from other people. (A clear claim, but no purpose.)
Strong	Dickens presents Scrooge's isolation as his own choice, in order to show readers that selfishness cuts people off from the warmth of other people.
Top level	Dickens presents Scrooge as an outsider by choice, yet hints that he can still be reached; in doing so, he warns wealthy readers and persuades them that change is possible.

Strong theses for other set texts

- In Macbeth, Shakespeare presents Macbeth's ambition as a force that destroys his conscience, in order to warn his audience that disrupting the natural order leads to chaos.
- In An Inspector Calls, Priestley presents the Inspector as the voice of social responsibility, in order to persuade his post-war audience to reject the selfishness of the Birlings.
- In 'Ozymandias', from the Power and Conflict cluster, Shelley presents human power as temporary, in order to show that even the proudest ruler is humbled by time.

Your turn

Write a thesis for each question. Start with the Securing frame if you need it, then try to add a purpose and a complication.

1. How does Dickens present the importance of family in A Christmas Carol?

2. How does Dickens use the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come to frighten Scrooge into changing?

3. How does Shakespeare present Lady Macbeth as a powerful woman?

4. How does Shakespeare present guilt in Macbeth?

5. How does Priestley present Sheila as a character who changes?

Check your thesis

- ☐ It answers the question that was asked
- ☐ It uses the words of the question
- ☐ It makes an argument someone could disagree with
- ☐ It names the writer's purpose
- ☐ Every paragraph I plan will support it