

Thesis Statements: What are they?

A thesis statement is the main idea that your essay supports. It is similar to a topic sentence for a paragraph, only it speaks for the entire essay. A very complex thesis statement may take up a whole paragraph, but the standard freshman composition essay does the job in one concise sentence.

The thesis statement has 3 main parts: the limited subject, the precise opinion, and the blueprint.

1. Limited Subject

The limited subject tells the reader exactly on what, or whom the article focuses. The book title (*Black Elk Speaks*), from the example, is the limited subject of the thesis statement:

Black Elk Speaks accurately represents Indian lifestyle through its attention to cultural detail, its use of Indian words, and its direct quotes from Black Elk.

2. Precise Opinion

The precise opinion gives your answer to a question about the subject.

Black Elk Speaks accurately represents Indian lifestyle by its attention to cultural detail, its use of Indian words, and its direct quotes from Black Elk.

Note: a question without an answer is not an opinion: "Does *Black Elk Speaks* accurately represent Indian lifestyle?"

Below is an example of a different precise opinion. Either is acceptable, as long as the rest of the essay supports the opinion:

Black Elk Speaks fails to represent Indian lifestyle by its lack of attention to cultural detail, its misunderstanding of Indian words, and its lack of quotes from Black Elk himself.

A good precise opinion is vital to the reader's comprehension of the goal of the essay.

3. Blueprint

A blueprint is a plan for the essay. Just like the blueprint of a building tells you what the finished product is supposed to look like, the blueprint of an essay permits you to see the whole shape of your ideas before you start churning out whole paragraphs.

Black Elk Speaks accurately represents Indian lifestyle by its attention to cultural detail, its use of Indian words, and its direct quotes from Black Elk.

In the blueprint, the author signals an intention to support the precise opinion. The author of the example above introduces three different kinds of evidence: cultural detail, Indian words, and quotes from Black Elk. Informed by this blueprint, the reader expects to encounter one section (a paragraph or more) devoted to each subtopic.

To emphasize the structure of your essay, repeat each phrase of the blueprint as you introduce the paragraph(s) in which you expand and support each point that you want to make. The way you introduce the supporting evidence is through topic sentences, miniature thesis statements that echo the main idea.

Note: If you repeat your blueprint phrases and your thesis statement robotically ("The third point I want to talk about is how *Black Elk Speaks* accurately represents the Indian lifestyle through its direct quotes from Black Elk."), your writing will be rather dry and lifeless.

Note: A thesis statement amounts to nothing if the paper is not completely focused on that main point. Blueprinting helps create the coherency of the thesis throughout the entire essay, which makes it a necessary part of the thesis statement.

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Five Steps to a Phat Thesis

- Step 1
 - Read the Prompt
 - What are the key terms or phrases?
 - What is the prompt asking?
- Step 2
 - Brainstorm the Prompt
 - What information is necessary to answer the prompt?
 - What do I know about the subject?
 - What categories seem to work the best?
 - Use a Graphic Organizer
 - Outline, Web, T-chart, Double-Bubble, or Timeline
- Step 3
 - Write a preliminary thesis
 - Provide an answer to the Prompt
 - Provide areas of categorization
 - Provide similarities and differences (in comparison essay)
 - Provide change and continuity (in COT essay)
- Step 4
 - Reevaluate the Thesis and Recategorize
 - Do the categories accurately reflect your evidence?
- Step 5
 - Write

Thesis Musts
1. – AP
2. – Place/Time
3. – 3 Categories

Cultural Analysis

Categorization

What to look for:

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How to find it:

1. **Political:** Who is in charge? What is power based on? Who gives that person or group power? Is there a contract? What's the government?
2. **Economic:** How do people earn their food? Is it based on agriculture, commerce, small trades or professions, or industry, like manufacturing or technology? Where's the money?
3. **Religious:** What is the meaning of life? Where did the group come from? What happens when they die? How do they spend their lives? Who talks to god(s)?
4. **Social:** How does the group relate to one another? How do people communicate? What do people do together? How is the group organized?
5. **Intellectual:** Who are the thinkers? What groups are given the chance to learn? How do people learn? Where does knowledge come from?
6. **Artistic:** How do they express themselves? What commitment to self-expression do they have? What technology or resources are given to art?
7. **Near?:** In what geographic region is this located? What geographic landscape makes up the region? How are the people/events effected by the geography?

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P olitical				
E conomic				
R eligious				
S ocial				
I ntellectual				
A rtistic				
N ear				

Essay Outline

The basic essay structure for a 5-paragraph expository essay. Each CD would be followed by at least two CMs that analyze the CD and connect it to the Thesis.

Thesis _____

Body TS 1 _____

Body 1 CD A _____

Body 1 CD B _____

Body 1 CD C _____

Body TS 2 _____

Body 2 CD A _____

Body 2 CD B _____

Body 2 CD C _____

Body TS 3 _____

Body 3 CD A _____

Body 3 CD B _____

Body 3 CD C _____