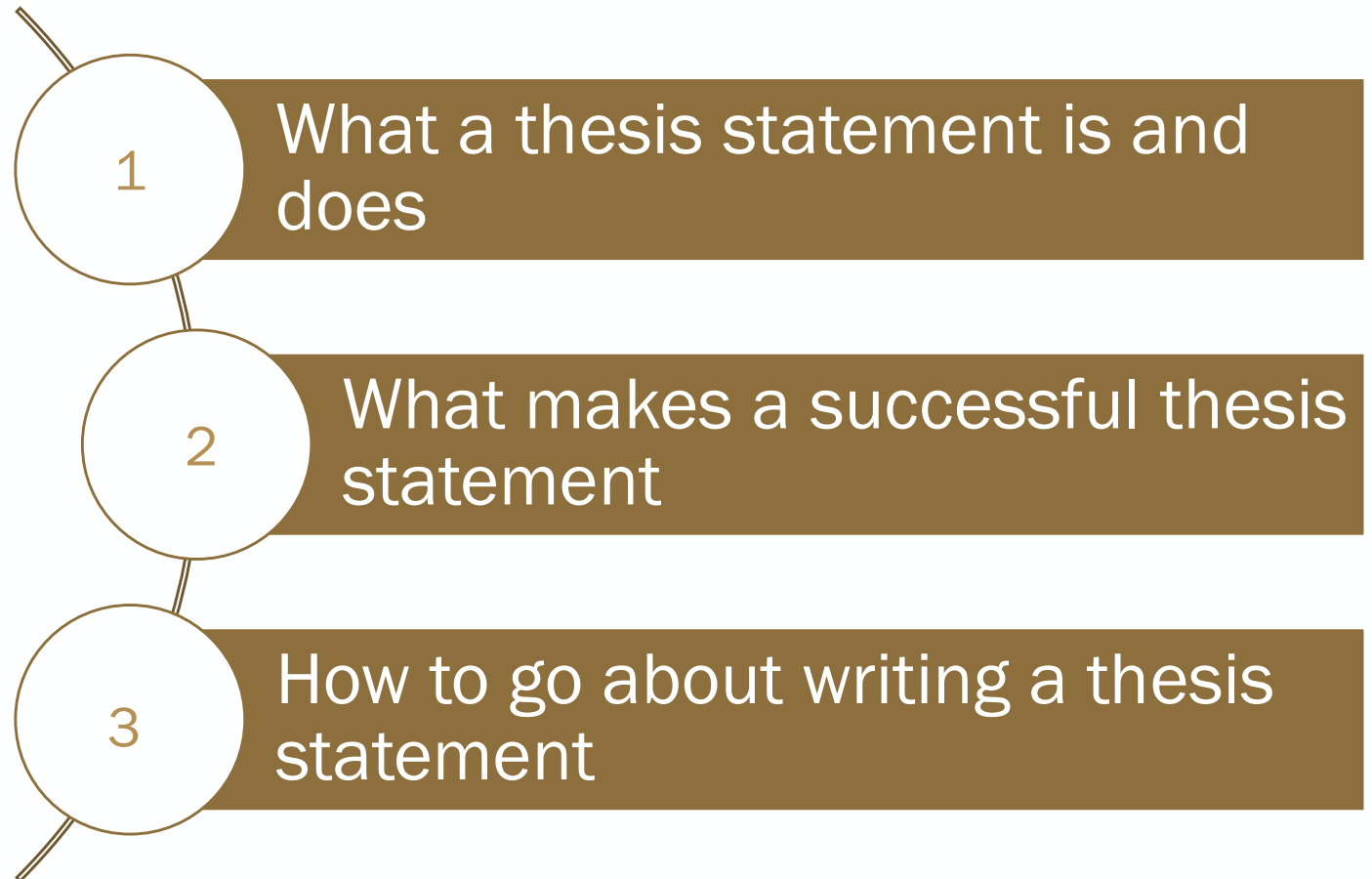


Writing the thesis statement for a world literature paper

Purdue OWL

This presentation will cover :

Overview



What a thesis statement is and does

- A thesis statement is a sentence that articulates the **central argument** of your essay. It is the main take away for your reader.
- The thesis statement should appear early in the paper, usually at the end of the first paragraph, so that readers understand the focus or purpose of the paper.

Example:

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift emphasizes the cold and lifeless character of Houyhnhnm society in order to criticize the Enlightenment ideal of rationality.

What makes a successful thesis statement?

- *“A good thesis statement makes a claim ” (Gocsik 75).*
- *A good thesis statement is arguable .*
- *A good thesis statement signals the argument’s scope and structure .*

What makes a successful thesis statement? (cont.) (1)

Making a claim

- **Example 1 does not make a claim:**

“The Houyhnhnms are cold and lifeless.”

This sentence makes an observation, not a claim.

- **Example 2 does make a claim:**

“Swift emphasizes the cold and lifeless character of the Houyhnhnms in order to criticize the Enlightenment ideal of rationality.”

This sentence tells us why the observation about the Houyhnhnms is significant. It makes a claim about why the Houyhnhnms coldness is important.

What makes a successful thesis statement? (cont.) (2)

Presents an argument

Example of an argument:

“Swift emphasizes the cold and lifeless character of the Houyhnhnms in order to criticize the Enlightenment ideal of rationality.”

Some people might disagree with the above statement, arguing instead that the Houyhnhnms represent a positive alternative to the Yahoos. This means that the statement is arguable.

What makes a successful thesis statement? (cont.) (3)

Signals scope and structure

Example that signals scope and structure:

“In three encounters between Gulliver and his Houyhnhnm master, Swift emphasizes the lifelessness of Houyhnhnm society in order to criticize the Enlightenment ideal of rationality.”

“ In three encounters between Gulliver and his Houyhnhnm master” indicates that the paper will focus on these two characters and will likely feature three passages that describe encounters between the characters.

How to go about writing your thesis

- First, Identify your **topic**
- Next, develop a **question** about that topic and gather relevant evidence.
- Finally, compose a **thesis** that answers the question.

How to go about writing your thesis (cont.) (1)

Identify your topic

- Make an observation about the literary text(s).
- What do you notice about the work that interests you? For example, it might be a particular theme, pattern, image, contradiction, problem.
- From this observation, identify your topic. What subject will your paper consider?

How to go about writing your thesis (cont.) (2)

Develop a question and gather evidence

- Now that you know your topic, write a question about that topic.
- What is the problem or issue you want to solve in this paper?
- Turn to the primary text and identify several passages that help to answer you question.

How to go about writing your thesis (cont.) (3)

Compose a thesis that answers the question

- After considering, the evidence in the text, write a sentence that answers your question. Now you have a working thesis.
- Do some reading and brainstorming and then return to your thesis sentence.
- Revise the sentence (e.g., replacing vague terms with precise ones, eliminating wordiness, and adding new ideas) until it conveys your argument with clarity and precision.

How to go about writing your thesis (cont.) (4)

Additional examples of thesis statements

- A paper about Frederick Douglass:

“Learning to read and write is the most important factor leading to Douglass’ escape from slavery” (Gocsik 76)

- Comparative paper 1:

In Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” the extraordinary physical forms of both Gregor and the old man provide the basis for an exploration of human loneliness.

- Comparative paper 2:

Although Leo Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” and Herman Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener* both end with the death of the protagonist, Tolstoy’s picture of death allows for the possibility of redemption while Melville portrays death as an irrevocable tragedy.

Thank You

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