

Thesis Statement for a Literature Paper

SUU Writing Center

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A thesis statement for a literary analysis should meet the following guidelines:

- It should provide a **FOCUS** for your essay, meaning it should narrow your field of discussion from a broad topic to a specific line of reasoning/argumentation within that topic area.

INADEQUATE	BETTER
Topic too broad: Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> offers readers a unique illustration of marriage in 19 th Century England.	Narrowed topic: The marriage between Lydia and Mr. Wickham in Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> serves as the work's primary method of deconstructing England's 19 th Century marriage customs. **Note: When writing about literature, film, etc., always use PRESENT tense in referring to events in the text if you are writing for English professors and scholars.

- It should **LIMIT** itself to what can be accomplished in the specified number of pages.

Example (five-six page paper):

Not specific enough for 5-6 pages: The narrative <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> contrasts two versions of power.	More specific for 5-6 pages: In <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> , Jacobs details the battle of words between her master and herself, revealing the intellectual prowess of those who, like her, are condemned to slavery.
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- It should offer an **ARGUMENT/ANALYSIS** which the essay will support and develop.

Example:

Inadequate analysis: D'arcy McMickle's <i>The Surrounded</i> details the opposing identities of the main character—Archilde—through his interactions with and response to other characters.	A clearer argument: Through conflicting interaction with other characters in D'arcy McMickle's <i>The Surrounded</i> , Archilde becomes a prototype of Native Americans' struggle for maintaining tribal identity.
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- Finally, the thesis statement should be provided **EARLY IN THE ESSAY** in order to establish your position and give the reader a sense of direction. If your thesis statement is not obvious within the first paragraph (perhaps the second paragraph for long research papers where additional introductory material is warranted), consider revising your introduction so that your audience is properly informed of your paper's intention from the beginning.