

4.4 Writing a thesis statement

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 13 marks

Objective

Build the skills to write a thesis that **survives** the essay you go on to write.

You must be able to:

- write a thesis narrow enough to defend in the space available
- revise a thesis after drafting if the argument has moved
- avoid a thesis that promises more than the essay delivers
- test a thesis against your own paragraph claims

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Scope

A thesis must be defensible in the length available. "Education should be reformed" cannot be. "Timed exams measure a skill that no job requires" can be, in an essay.

■ Revising after drafting

Arguments move while being written. If your last paragraph makes a claim the thesis did not promise, change the thesis—it is the cheapest repair and the most commonly skipped.

■ Not promising too much

A thesis claiming three things and an essay defending one is a broken promise the reader notices. Claim what you will actually argue.

■ Testing against paragraphs

List your paragraph claims. If one does not serve the thesis, either it goes or the thesis changes. Both are legitimate; leaving the mismatch is not.

2 Practice

2.1 State what makes a thesis appropriately scoped.

[2]

2.2 State what to do when the drafted essay outruns the thesis. [2]

2.3 Thesis: "School uniforms are harmful." The essay argues only about cost.

(a) Name the problem. [1]

(b) State two possible fixes. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A thesis that promises three arguments in an essay that makes one is [1]

- **A** appropriately broad
- **B** a broken promise the reader notices
- **C** well scoped
- **D** a concession

3.2 The cheapest repair when an essay has moved beyond its thesis is to [1]

- **A** delete the essay
- **B** revise the thesis
- **C** add a conclusion
- **D** change the title

3.3 Prompt: "Is it right to require volunteering for graduation?"

(a) Write a thesis you could defend in five paragraphs. [2]

(b) List the paragraph claims that would serve it. [2]

4 Go further

- work through the **4.4 Writing a thesis statement** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Introductions, Conclusions, and Development** section of the AP English Language handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 it is narrow enough to be defended in the space available and still disputable.

2.2 revise the thesis to match the argument actually made, rather than leaving the mismatch.

2.3 (a) the thesis promises more than the essay delivers. (b) narrow the thesis to cost; or add the arguments the thesis promised.

3.1 B. the reader is told to expect three and given one.

3.2 B. changing one sentence is cheaper than rewriting the argument.

3.3 (a) a specific, defensible thesis. (b) two or three paragraph claims, each of which serves it.