

6.4 Writing a thesis statement

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 18 marks**

Objective

Build the skills to write a **qualified** thesis that remains an argument.

You must be able to:

- write a thesis with a limiting clause that does real work
- avoid a qualification that empties the claim
- decide when a qualification belongs in the thesis and when in a paragraph
- test a qualified thesis for defensibility

1 Worked examples

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

■ **A limiting clause that works**

“Later school start times help, **but only where transport can be rescheduled.**”
The clause names the condition, so the reader knows exactly what is being claimed and what would refute it.

■ **Emptying the claim**

“Later start times may help some students in some circumstances” claims nothing; there is no case it excludes. A qualification must still leave something at stake.

■ **Where to put it**

A condition central to the argument belongs in the thesis. A minor exception belongs in the paragraph where it arises; putting it in the thesis makes the essay look narrower than it is.

2 Practice

2.1 State what a good limiting clause does for the reader. [2]

2.2 State the test of whether a qualification has emptied a claim. [2]

2.3 Thesis: “Congestion charging may possibly help in certain places.”

(a) State the weakness. [1]

(b) Rewrite it as a qualified but defensible thesis. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A qualification belongs in the thesis when it is [1]

- **A** a minor exception
- **B** a condition central to the argument
- **C** unrelated
- **D** the writer’s opinion

3.2 A claim that excludes no case has been [1]

- **A** properly qualified
- **B** emptied
- **C** strengthened
- **D** narrowed usefully

3.3 Prompt: “Should exam results decide university entry?”

- Write a qualified thesis. [2]
- State what would refute it. [1]

3.4 Full free-response task. Some argue that social media platforms should be legally responsible for content their users post; others argue that this would make platforms censor lawful speech to protect themselves.

Write an essay that argues a **qualified** position on platform liability. Your thesis must remain an argument: a qualification is not a refusal to take a side.

Marked on the AP 6-point rubric: **Row A** — Thesis (1), **Row B** — Evidence and Commentary (4), **Row C** — Sophistication (1).

[6]

Solutions

2.1 it names the condition under which the claim holds, so the reader knows what is claimed and what would refute it.

2.2 ask what case it excludes; if none, the qualification has emptied it.

2.3 (a) “may possibly” and “certain places” exclude nothing, so nothing is claimed. (b) a definite qualified claim, e.g. “Congestion charging reduces peak traffic where an alternative route exists, and raises hardship where it does not”.

3.1 B. central conditions define the claim itself.

3.2 B. a claim that excludes nothing asserts nothing.

3.3 (a) a definite claim with a working limiting clause. (b) a stated condition or case that would show the claim false.

3.4 Row A — Thesis (1). The point requires a qualification that **still commits**. **Earns it:** “Platforms should be liable for the content their systems actively promote, but not for content they merely host — because recommendation is an editorial act and storage is not.” **Does not:** “Both sides make good points and the answer lies somewhere in the middle” — a hedge with no ground of decision is not a qualified thesis, and it forfeits Row A.

Row B — Evidence and Commentary (0–4). A qualified argument must do **two** jobs and be marked on both: establish the position inside the limit, and justify the limit itself. Four points requires evidence for each. The most common 3-point response argues the position well and asserts the boundary without defending it. Strong responses treat the exception as the argument’s most contestable part and defend it hardest.

Row C — Sophistication (1). Earned by making the qualification do genuine work — for example, showing that the distinction between hosting and promoting is not merely convenient but tracks the thing the law is trying to reach, and acknowledging the hard case (a platform whose ranking is automated and unexamined) rather than avoiding it. A qualification introduced only to appear balanced does not earn the point.