

Exercise walk-through

Developing a literary thesis statement ■ 4.11

eXercise

You must be able to

- state what a thesis expresses and requires
- explain what makes a thesis interpretive rather than descriptive
- state what the CED does not require of a thesis
- test a draft thesis

Method — The requirement

A thesis statement expresses an interpretation of a literary text and requires a defense through use of textual evidence and a line of reasoning, both of which are explained in an essay through commentary.

Method — Interpretive

A thesis must be something a reasonable reader could dispute. If nobody could disagree, there is nothing to defend and the essay has no work to do.

Method — What is not required

A thesis need not list the points of an interpretation, the literary elements to be analysed, or the specific evidence to be used. Previewing the line of reasoning is permitted, not mandatory.

Method — The test

Ask: could someone who has read the story disagree with this? If not, it is a summary.
Then ask: what would I have to show to prove it? If nothing comes to mind, it is too vague.

Practice 2.1 ■ 2 marks

State what a thesis expresses and requires.

Solution 2.1

Method: The requirement

Worked steps

an interpretation of a literary text **B1** requiring a defense through textual evidence and a line of reasoning **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

Explain what makes a thesis interpretive.

Solution 2.2

Method: Interpretive

Worked steps

a reasonable reader could dispute it **B1**, so there is something for the essay to defend **B1**.

Practice 2.3 ■ 2 marks

A draft thesis can be tested.

- (a) State the two test questions.
- (b) State what the CED does not require.

Solution 2.3

Worked steps

(a) could someone who read the story disagree with this; what would I have to show to prove it **B2**. (b) it need not list points, elements or specific evidence **B1**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

A thesis a reasonable reader could not dispute is

A a summary

B ideal

C an interpretation

D a line of reasoning

Solution 3.1

Method: Interpretive

A a summary



B ideal

C an interpretation

D a line of reasoning

Worked steps

A. a summary.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

Previewing the line of reasoning is

- A** mandatory
- B** permitted but not required
- C** forbidden
- D** the whole thesis

Solution 3.2

Method: What is not required

- A mandatory
- B permitted but not required 
- C forbidden
- D the whole thesis

Worked steps

B. permitted, not required.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 1 mark

A student writes: “The story is about a family in winter.”

- (a) State why this is not a thesis.
- (b) Rewrite it as one.

Solution 3.3

Worked steps

(a) nobody could dispute it **B1**. (b) any arguable interpretation, e.g. “the story uses the family’s silence about the cold to show how they avoid speaking about the loss it stands for” **B2**.