

Exercise walk-through

Developing a literary thesis statement ■ 5.8

eXercise

You must be able to

- state what a thesis expresses and requires
- explain what a poetry thesis must avoid
- state what the CED does not require
- test a poetry thesis

Method — The requirement

A thesis expresses an interpretation of a literary text and requires a defense through textual evidence and a line of reasoning, explained through commentary.

Method — What to avoid

A poetry thesis that names devices — “the poet uses imagery, metaphor and structure” — is a list, not an interpretation. It could be written about almost any poem, which is the test that it says nothing.

Method — What is not required

A thesis need not list the points of an interpretation, the literary elements to be analysed, or specific evidence.

Method — The test

Could this thesis be written about a different poem? If yes, it is not yet about this one.
A good poetry thesis names what this poem does that another does not.

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 defense through textual evidence and a line of reasoning explained by commentary **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

Explain what a poetry thesis must avoid.

Solution 2.2

Method: What to avoid

Worked steps

naming devices rather than making an interpretive claim **B1**, since a device list could be written about almost any poem **B1**.

Practice 2.3 ■ 1 mark

A thesis can be tested.

- (a) State the test question.
- (b) State what a good poetry thesis names.

Solution 2.3

Method: The test

Worked steps

(a) could this thesis be written about a different poem **B1**. (b) what this poem does **B1** that another does not **B1**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

A thesis that could be written about almost any poem

A says nothing specific

B is ideal

C is an interpretation

D is a line of reasoning

Solution 3.1

Method: What to avoid

A says nothing specific



B is ideal

C is an interpretation

D is a line of reasoning

Worked steps

A. it is not about this poem.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

The CED says a thesis need not list

A the literary elements to be analysed

B the title

C the poet

D the date

Solution 3.2

A the literary elements to be analysed



B the title

C the poet

D the date

Worked steps

A. the elements to be analysed.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 1 mark

A student writes: “The poet uses imagery and metaphor to convey emotion.”

- (a) State why this fails.
- (b) Rewrite it as a thesis.

Solution 3.3

Method: What to avoid

Worked steps

(a) it names devices instead of stating an interpretation **B1**. (b) any specific arguable claim, e.g. “the poem’s images of enclosure make the speaker’s freedom at the end read as loss rather than release” **B2**.