

Exercise walk-through

Developing a literary thesis statement ■ 6.10

eXercise

You must be able to

- state what a thesis expresses and requires
- explain the particular difficulty of a long text
- state what the CED does not require
- narrow a thesis to something an essay can prove

Method — The requirement

An interpretation of a literary text, requiring defense through textual evidence and a line of reasoning, explained through commentary.

Method — The difficulty

A long text invites a thesis too large to defend: “the novel explores the nature of freedom” cannot be proved in five paragraphs. The skill is narrowing.

Method — What is not required

A thesis need not list points, elements or evidence. Narrowing is not the same as listing.

Method — How to narrow

Attach the claim to something specific the text does — a pattern, a change, a contrast — rather than to a theme. “The novel’s three refusals of inheritance make freedom look like poverty” is defensible; “the novel explores freedom” is not.

Practice 2.1 ■ 2 marks

Explain the particular difficulty of a thesis about a long text.

Solution 2.1

Method: The difficulty

Worked steps

a long text invites a claim too large to defend in an essay **B1**, so the skill is narrowing **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

State how to narrow a thesis.

Solution 2.2

Worked steps

attach the claim to something specific the text does **B1** — a pattern, a change or a contrast rather than a theme **B1**.

Practice 2.3 ■ 2 marks

Narrowing is not listing.

(a) State the difference.

(b) State what a thesis requires as defense.

Solution 2.3

Method: What is not required

Worked steps

(a) narrowing makes the claim provable **B1**; listing merely announces topics without making a claim **B1**. (b) textual evidence and a line of reasoning explained through commentary **B1**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

A thesis about “the nature of freedom” in a novel is likely

A too large to defend

B ideal

C too narrow

D a line of reasoning

Solution 3.1

Method: The difficulty

A too large to defend



B ideal

C too narrow

D a line of reasoning

Worked steps

A. too large.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

A defensible thesis attaches its claim to

A something specific the text does

B a general theme

C the author's life

D the genre

Solution 3.2

Method: How to narrow

A something specific the text does



B a general theme

C the author's life

D the genre

Worked steps

A. something specific the text does.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 1 mark

A student writes: “This novel is about the conflict between duty and desire.”

- (a) State the problem.
- (b) Rewrite it as a defensible thesis.

Solution 3.3

Worked steps

(a) it names a theme rather than making an arguable claim **B1**. (b) any narrowed arguable claim, e.g. “the novel gives duty all its formal language and desire none, so the reader hears duty as public and desire as unspeakable” **B2**.