

Developing the Thesis Statement

Only after reading the prompt, marking the verbs and conjunctions, and outlining how you intend to proceed, should the thesis statement be constructed. The thesis statement is the most important sentence in an essay. It must be clear, properly structured and in the correct place. A good thesis sentence has the following characteristics:

- a single declaratory sentence
- answers the prompt
- contains a clearly and simply stated opinion
- never restates the question

Given this prompt: "How successful was organized labor in improving the position of workers in the period from 1875 to 1900? Analyze the factors that contributed to the level of success achieved."

In this case, the first step is to determine if the period 1875 to 1900 was a time of labor success or a time of extreme hardship and struggle for organized labor? Your opinion is essential and must be clearly stated. If you believe the time was not one of labor success your thesis statement might be:

- The last thirty years of the 1900s nearly destroyed organized labor.
- OR
- These years were a period of extreme struggle for organized labor

Do NOT restate the prompt. Rather than write "the time period 1875 to 1900," use "the last decades of the nineteenth century" or "the three decades following the Civil War." Instead of writing "organized labor," refer to labor unions.

Once your opinion is formed, write a sentence that is both specific and complex. One way to do this is to begin the thesis statement with "although." Recent AP grading rubrics have awarded high scores only to those essays which "address the complexity of the question."

For the question above, possible thesis statements include:

- Although the last decades of the nineteenth century were periods of intense labor organization, they nearly destroyed labor unions.
- OR
- Although the post-Civil War period saw increased labor organization, it was also a time of government persecution of labor unions.

Note the writer's opinion/answer is found in the second half of the thesis statement.

Having determined the thesis statement, you are now ready to address the introductory paragraph. For some APUS essays, this "paragraph" may only be two or three sentences. Regardless of the exact number of sentences, the thesis sentence should follow one or more general sentences introducing the topic and should be the final sentence of your introductory paragraph.

In reference to the prompt above, the general topic is labor. Using one of the thesis statements developed, an introduction might be:

- Labor unions had existed in America since the early days of industrialism and grew in number prior to the Civil War. Although the post Civil War period saw increased labor organization, it was also a time of government persecution of labor unions.

Recent APUS essay rubrics awarded high scores to essays that had "a clear, well developed thesis" that was "focused on the prompt" and "guides the essay throughout."

In short

- A thesis statement is a single declarative sentence that "answers" the prompt with the writer's opinion.
- The thesis statement must address the complexity of the prompt. One way of accomplishing this is to begin the thesis statement with "although."
- The thesis statement is the last sentence in the introductory paragraph.