



## *Before Epics Come Essays*

### Unit 1: Beginning Well

#### Lesson 3: Essay in a Nutshell—The Thesis Statement

The Denim Beret  
writing and literature  
for teens

***This sample begins mid-lesson.***

## SESSION 2

### Lesson, part 2: Where to Place Thesis Statements

Thesis statements are typically placed near or at the end of the introductory paragraph, just as the topic sentence usually follows a hook sentence in a single-paragraph essay. The end of the introductory paragraph is not the only acceptable location for the thesis statement, though. Just as with topic sentences in single-paragraph essays, thesis statements can also be placed at or near the beginning of the introduction or somewhere in the conclusion. They can also be merely implied, so that the reader must infer the main idea for himself, but these usually work best in personal or informal essays. In this level of *The Denim Beret*, you will place your thesis statements in the introductory paragraph only, because it is the best way to master this skill.

### Lesson, part 3: Bad vs. Good Thesis Statements

The first thing you need to know to write a good thesis statement is what it is not. This might help you clarify the concept in your mind and focus on what it is. A thesis statement is none of the following:

- a statement of “dead-end” fact, where the natural response is “So what?”
  - Shakespeare’s play, *Romeo and Juliet*, is about two feuding families and a doomed, adolescent romance. (To which the reader might naturally respond, “Okay, so what?”)
- a statement that announces what the paper will be about
  - This essay will discuss the themes of love and hate in Shakespeare’s tragic romance, *Romeo and Juliet*.

- a statement that admits that it is an opinion
  - I think that Franco Zefferelli's movie version of *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the best movies ever made.
- a question
  - Why is the tragic tale of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* so enduring after 400 years?
- a quotation
  - In the closing lines of *Romeo and Juliet*, the narrator sadly states, "For never was a story of more woe/ Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

So if it is none of these things, what is a thesis statement? What does a good one look like? A thesis statement has the following traits:

- It is a single sentence that presents a single idea—essentially, it is the entire essay in a nutshell. The sentence may be simple or complex, short or long, but it must be clear and to the point.
- It makes a claim or assertion that naturally invites discussion or debate.
- It is usually found near the beginning of the paper but may sometimes appear in the conclusion.
- It is usually stated but may sometimes be implied through the context of the whole essay.
- It is stated as a fact, even though it isn't.
- It is usually formal and objective—no slang or personal references.
- It directly answers the leading question.
  - Prompt: Discuss the central theme of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.
  - Thesis statement: The danger of unsupervised adolescence is the theme that forms the heart of Shakespeare's tragic play, *Romeo and Juliet*.
- Usually this claim or assertion will be an obvious opinion, and sometimes it is a subtle opinion. Subtle opinions may sound like facts but are not, because they aren't "So what?" statements; they still demand proof.
  - Obvious opinion: Franco Zefferelli's movie version of *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the best movies ever made. (Notice the similarity to the third example above, except that it is stated like a fact.)
  - Subtle opinion: The Middle Ages produced several important playwrights, including William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Thomas Kyd. (to which the reader might naturally respond, "Okay, prove that they were important.")

## Lesson, part 4: A Quick Word about Thesis Statement Structures

When you are trying to craft a thesis statement, you may sometimes know what you want to say but don't know how to say it. The temptation may be to word your sentence in the simplest way possible, which in English is subject first, verb second—like “*Romeo and Juliet* is one of Shakespeare's greatest plays.” While nothing is wrong with this sentence structure, and it may well be the best choice for what you want to communicate, other options are available. English allows for a great deal of variety in sentence structures. Here are some possibilities:

1. Complex sentence—contains at least one dependent clause (states your “occasion,” or topic) and at least one independent clause (states your “position,” or opinion) –  
*Example: Although Shakespeare wrote many excellent plays, Romeo and Juliet is one of his most memorable.*
2. Number statement—often a simple sentence that contains a number word, either specific or non-specific, which indicates the number of points the writer will discuss –  
*Example: Romeo and Juliet is one of Shakespeare's greatest plays for four/many/several reasons.”*
3. Conjunctive adverb statements—contains two independent clauses with a conjunctive adverb inbetween that turns the sentence in a different direction –  
*Example: William Shakespeare wrote many memorable plays; however, Romeo and Juliet is his most popular play among young audiences.*
4. Preposition starter statements—this kind of sentence opens with a prepositional phrase –  
*Example: About Shakespeare's ingenuity there can be no doubt, especially because of his popular tragedy Romeo and Juliet.*
5. Infinitive starter statements—This kind of sentence opens with an infinitive—  
*Example: To watch Shakespeare's tragic romance, Romeo and Juliet, is to watch one of the greatest plays ever written.*
6. Compound sentence – In this kind of sentence, two independent clauses are joined with a coordinating conjunction –  
*Example: Many of Shakespeare's plays are memorable for their exciting plots and exquisite poetry, but Romeo and Juliet is the most memorable of them all.*

These aren't the only sentence structures you can use, but hopefully they will help you see the possibilities available beyond the typical subject-verb structure. When you get stuck, refer to this list and allow it to lead you to new ideas. For handy reference, you may want to print the list and paste it into your writing notebook.

### Conclusion:

Every formal essay/paper needs a thesis statement. Since the function of a thesis statement is to encapsulate your entire paper in the proverbial nutshell and give your ideas a basis for clear organization and strong structure, it is essential that you master this skill. Once you

do, your prewriting and drafting will be easier and more focused, and your writing as a whole will start to improve.

## SESSION 3-4

### Exercises:

Complete the lesson 3 worksheet.

***End of sample***