

ANALYTICAL THESIS STATEMENT WORK-SHEET

WHAT IS AN ANALYTICAL THESIS?

An analytical thesis makes a **specific, arguable claim** about HOW or WHY something works, what it means, or what it reveals. It goes beyond summary to offer **insight and interpretation**.

NOT Analytical (Just Summary):

“The Great Gatsby is about a wealthy man who throws parties to win back his former love.”

Analytical (Makes a Claim):

“Through Gatsby’s doomed pursuit of Daisy, Fitzgerald reveals that the American Dream is fundamentally corrupted by materialism and social class barriers.”

STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR SUBJECT & FOCUS

What Are You Analyzing?

Subject: _____ (*Text, film, speech, artwork, historical event, social issue, etc.*)

What Aspect Will You Focus On?

Check all that apply: - ☐ Themes (underlying messages/ideas) - ☐ Symbolism (objects/images with deeper meaning) - ☐ Character development/motivations - ☐ Literary/rhetorical techniques (metaphor, irony, repetition, etc.) - ☐ Structure/organization - ☐ Cause and effect relationships - ☐ Compare/contrast elements - ☐ Historical/cultural context - ☐ Author’s purpose/argument

Your Analytical Focus: _____

Example: Analyzing The Great Gatsby focusing on symbolism and themes

STEP 2: MOVE FROM TOPIC TO CLAIM

Level 1: Topic (Too Broad)

What is your general topic? _____

Example: “The American Dream in The Great Gatsby”

Level 2: Topic + Opinion (Still Too Simple)

What is your opinion or observation about this topic? _____

Example: "The American Dream in The Great Gatsby is negative."

Level 3: Analytical Claim (Getting Better!)

HOW or WHY is this true? What's your insight? _____

Example: "The American Dream in The Great Gatsby is shown to be corrupt and unattainable through the use of symbolism."

Level 4: Sophisticated Thesis (Best!)

Add specific supporting points and deeper meaning: _____

Example: "Through the symbolism of the green light, the valley of ashes, and Gatsby's parties, Fitzgerald reveals that the American Dream is an illusion that destroys those who pursue it, exposing the moral bankruptcy of 1920s American society."

THESIS STATEMENT FORMULAS

Choose the formula that best fits your analysis:

Formula 1: Literary/Rhetorical Analysis

[Author] uses [technique 1], [technique 2], and [technique 3] to [reveal/demonstrate/argue] that [your claim about meaning/significance].

Your Turn: _____

Example: "Shakespeare uses dramatic irony, foreshadowing, and the imagery of light and darkness to demonstrate that unchecked ambition leads to moral corruption and self-destruction in Macbeth."

Formula 2: Thematic Analysis

In [text], [theme] is represented through [element 1] and [element 2], which reveals [deeper insight about human nature/society/condition].

Your Turn: _____

Example: "In 1984, the theme of totalitarian control is represented through language manipulation and constant surveillance, which reveals that authoritar-

ian regimes maintain power by destroying individuals' capacity for independent thought."

Formula 3: Character Analysis

[Character's] [actions/decisions/development] reveals [author's message] about [universal theme/human condition].

Your Turn: _____

Example: "Hamlet's paralysis between thought and action reveals Shakespeare's insight that excessive introspection can become a form of moral cowardice that prevents ethical duty."

Formula 4: Comparative Analysis

While [Subject A] [characteristic/approach], [Subject B] [different characteristic/approach], and this contrast reveals [significance/deeper meaning].

Your Turn: _____

Example: "While Frankenstein's creature seeks connection and acceptance, Victor Frankenstein pursues isolation and denial, and this contrast reveals Shelley's argument that the rejection of responsibility for one's creations leads to destruction for both creator and creation."

Formula 5: Cause-Effect Analysis

[Subject's] [specific cause] leads to [specific effects], demonstrating [broader significance/pattern/truth].

Your Turn: _____

Example: "The Treaty of Versailles' punitive reparations and territorial losses imposed on Germany created economic devastation and national humiliation, demonstrating how overly harsh peace terms can sow the seeds for future conflict."

Formula 6: Rhetorical Analysis

Through [rhetorical strategy 1], [strategy 2], and [strategy 3], [speaker/author] [persuades/moves/convinces] their audience to [action/belief/emotion] in order to [ultimate purpose].

Your Turn: _____

Example: “Through emotional appeals to shared sacrifice, repetitive parallel structure emphasizing unity, and biblical allusions to moral authority, Martin Luther King Jr. persuades his audience that racial equality is both a practical necessity and moral imperative.”

STEP 3: THESIS QUALITY CHECKLIST

Test your thesis statement. It should be:

Specific

- ☐ Names the text/subject being analyzed
- ☐ Identifies specific techniques, elements, or examples
- ☐ Avoids vague words like “things,” “aspects,” “ways”

Is your thesis specific enough? _____

Arguable

- ☐ Someone could reasonably disagree with this claim
- ☐ Goes beyond obvious observations
- ☐ Requires evidence to prove

Could someone argue against your thesis? _____

Analytical (Not Just Summary)

- ☐ Uses analytical verbs: reveals, demonstrates, suggests, challenges, critiques, exposes
- ☐ Explains HOW or WHY, not just WHAT
- ☐ Makes a claim about meaning/significance

Does your thesis explain WHY something matters? _____

Sophisticated

- ☐ Shows complexity (multiple supporting points)
- ☐ Demonstrates deep thinking
- ☐ Connects to broader significance

Does your thesis show depth of analysis? _____

Focused

- ☐ Can be adequately supported in the essay length
- ☐ Has a clear, unified argument
- ☐ Stays on topic

Is your thesis focused enough for your essay length? _____

STEP 4: COMMON THESIS PITFALLS TO AVOID

The Summary Thesis

Weak: “Romeo and Juliet is about two young lovers whose families don’t get along.”

Why it fails: Just summarizes the plot; doesn’t analyze

Strong: “Shakespeare uses the motif of light and darkness throughout Romeo and Juliet to suggest that intense passion, while beautiful, is ultimately destructive and unsustainable.”

The Obvious Thesis

Weak: “Shakespeare’s use of language in Hamlet is effective.”

Why it fails: Too vague and obvious; no one would disagree

Strong: “Shakespeare’s use of disease and decay imagery throughout Hamlet demonstrates that moral corruption spreads like a contagion, infecting all levels of Danish society.”

The “List of Facts” Thesis

Weak: “The Great Gatsby uses symbolism, has interesting characters, and is set in the 1920s.”

Why it fails: Lists observations without making a claim about meaning

Strong: “Fitzgerald’s characterization of the shallow, materialistic party-goers juxtaposed with the symbolic valley of ashes exposes the moral emptiness at the heart of 1920s prosperity.”

The “About” Thesis

Weak: “This essay is about the symbolism in Lord of the Flies.”

Why it fails: Announces topic but doesn’t make an argument

Strong: “Golding’s symbols—the conch, the beast, and the Lord of the Flies—chart the boys’ descent from civilization to savagery, suggesting that social order is a fragile construct easily destroyed by fear and violence.”

The Personal Opinion Thesis

Weak: “I think Holden Caulfield is an annoying character who complains too much.”

Why it fails: Based on personal taste, not analytical insight

Strong: “Holden Caulfield’s contradictory behavior—seeking connection while pushing people away—reveals Salinger’s understanding that adolescent alienation stems from fear of the vulnerability that genuine relationships require.”

PRACTICE EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1: Identify the Weak Thesis

Mark whether each thesis is WEAK or STRONG and explain why:

A. “Social media has both positive and negative effects on teenagers.” - ☐ Weak
☐ Strong - Why? _____

B. “Orwell’s use of propaganda posters, Newspeak, and the Two Minutes Hate in 1984 demonstrates how totalitarian regimes manipulate language and emotion to eliminate independent thought.” - ☐ Weak ☐ Strong - Why?

C. “This paper will discuss the theme of revenge in Hamlet.” - ☐ Weak ☐ Strong - Why? _____

D. “Through the contrasting imagery of Wuthering Heights’ wild moors and Thrush cross Grange’s cultivated gardens, Brontë argues that passion and civilization are fundamentally incompatible forces.” - ☐ Weak ☐ Strong - Why?

EXERCISE 2: Upgrade Weak Theses

Transform these weak theses into strong analytical claims:

Weak Thesis #1: “The Crucible is about the Salem witch trials.”

Your Upgraded Version: _____

Possible Answer: “Miller uses the Salem witch trials as an allegory for 1950s McCarthyism, demonstrating how fear and moral certainty can transform communities into instruments of oppression.”

Weak Thesis #2: “Steve Jobs was a good speaker.”

Your Upgraded Version: _____

Possible Answer: “Steve Jobs’ rhetorical mastery—his use of the rule of three, strategic pauses, and narrative storytelling—transformed product launches into cultural events that sold not just technology but an aspirational lifestyle.”

Weak Thesis #3: “Climate change is a serious problem.”

Your Upgraded Version: _____

Possible Answer: “The language used in climate change discourse—from ‘global warming’ to ‘climate crisis’—reveals how linguistic framing shapes public perception and political will to act on environmental threats.”

EXERCISE 3: Build Your Own Thesis

Step 1: Choose a subject you’re analyzing: _____

Step 2: What’s your main observation about it? _____

Step 3: What techniques/elements support this observation? - Element 1: _____
- Element 2: _____
- Element 3: _____

Step 4: Why does this matter? What deeper meaning does it reveal?

Step 5: Combine everything into a complete thesis: _____

EXERCISE 4: Thesis Surgery

Take one of your existing thesis statements and improve it:

Your Original Thesis: _____

What's weak about it? - ☐ Too vague - ☐ Not arguable - ☐ Just summary - ☐ Lacks specific support - ☐ Doesn't explain significance - ☐ Other:

Apply one formula from above: Which formula? _____

Your Revised Thesis: _____

ANALYTICAL VERB BANK

Replace weak verbs like “shows,” “talks about,” or “is” with stronger analytical verbs:

For Revealing Meaning:

reveals | demonstrates | suggests | implies | illustrates | exposes | uncovers | illuminates

For Arguments/Claims:

argues | asserts | contends | claims | proposes | maintains | challenges | critiques

For Effects/Impact:

emphasizes | underscores | reinforces | undermines | complicates | highlights | intensifies

For Artistic Choices:

employs | utilizes | juxtaposes | contrasts | parallels | constructs | crafts | manipulates

FINAL THESIS STATEMENT

Write your final, polished thesis here:

Does it pass the checklist? - ☐ Specific (names text and techniques) - ☐ Arguable (someone could disagree) - ☐ Analytical (explains HOW/WHY) - ☐ Sophisticated (shows complexity) - ☐ Focused (appropriate scope)

Confidence Level: - [] Ready to use - [] Needs minor revision - [] Needs major revision

QUICK REFERENCE: THESIS TEMPLATES

1. [Author] uses [X], [Y], and [Z] to reveal that [claim].
2. Through [technique/element], [author] demonstrates [insight about theme/human nature].
3. While [A] represents [idea], [B] represents [contrasting idea], revealing that [significance].
4. [Author's] [specific choice] creates [specific effect], which [broader meaning/purpose].
5. In [work], [element] functions as [interpretation], suggesting that [deeper meaning].

Remember: A great thesis is your essay's promise to the reader. It tells them exactly what you'll argue and why it matters!