

Writing a Literature Paper

When you are writing a literature paper, you begin by creating a thesis statement that offers insight into one aspect of the book. Your paper uses literary criticism to back up that thesis. Every aspect of the paper must relate back to the thesis.

Thesis statements can revolve around:

1. The characters in a work and how those characters develop;
2. The religious or political symbols in a book (is someone symbolic of a religious figure or is a religious thought being portrayed through a fictional work?);
3. Significant imagery in a work (are animals, plants or other aspects of the natural world used to stir a particular emotion in a reader or support a theme or thought?);
4. One of the themes in a book and how that theme is developed as the story progresses (frequent themes include love, family, power, natural world vs. technology, individual vs. society, poverty vs. wealth);
5. The social context the book was written in and how that historical or social setting of the author influenced the story (was it written during a war or during a time of conflict?);

In the introduction, always give the title and author of your work. Get right to the point of your thesis quickly. Let readers know what directions you are going in with the paper—what characters or images or themes you are exploring. Typically, the thesis statement falls at the end of your introductory paragraph.

Sample thesis statements:

- In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare examines the foolhardiness that can often accompany love.
- Shelley's *Frankenstein* shows the folly of unchecked pride by showing her characters being defeated by their own ambitions.
- In "The Story of an Hour," Kate Chopin uses the setting to reflect the themes of personal identity and the role of women in marriage.
- Through the river and shore imagery in *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain suggests that people can only find the true expression of American ideals when they must leave "civilized" society and go back to the natural world.
- In "The Flying Machine," Ray Bradbury questions the ethics of using or improving technology without knowing the impact the technology will have on humanity.

The conclusion paragraph should begin with a recap/rewording of your thesis statement and move into a broader summary of how you proved your point throughout the paper.