

Identifying a Strong Thesis Statement

This exercise is intended to help demonstrate the effectiveness of a strong, argumentative thesis statement. Once you can identify the key elements of a strong thesis, you will be able to evaluate your own writing to determine if, and how, you can make your theses stronger.

For each pair of sentences below, select the one that you think would make the more effective thesis in the introductory paragraph of a short essay (approximately 400 to 600 words). You can even take a moment to identify any elements that might make the stronger thesis even more effective, especially for a longer assignment. Keep in mind that an effective thesis statement should be sharply focused and argumentative, not just a general statement of fact.

When you're done, compare your responses and reasoning with the suggested answers on the final page. Because these thesis statements appear outside the context of complete essays, all responses are judgment calls, not absolute certainties.

- (a) The Hunger Games is a science fiction adventure film based on the novel of the same name by Suzanne Collins.

(b) The Hunger Games is a morality tale about the dangers of a political system that is dominated by the wealthy.
- (a) There is no question that cell phones have changed our lives in a very big way.

(b) While cell phones provide freedom and mobility, they can also become a leash, compelling users to answer them anywhere and at any time.
- (a) College students looking for part-time work should begin their search by taking advantage of job-finding resources on campus.

(b) Finding a job is never easy, but it can be especially hard when the economy is still feeling the effects of a recession and employers are reluctant to hire new workers.
- (a) For the past three decades, coconut oil has been unjustly criticized as an artery-clogging saturated fat.

(b) Cooking oil is plant, animal, or synthetic fat that is used in frying, baking, and other types of cooking.
- (a) There have been over 200 movies about Count Dracula, most of them only very loosely based on the novel published by Bram Stoker in 1897.

(b) Despite its title, Bram Stoker's Dracula, a film directed by Francis Ford Coppola, takes considerable liberties with Stoker's novel.
- (a) The iPad has revolutionized the mobile-computing landscape and created a huge profit stream for Apple.

(b) The iPad, with its relatively large high-definition screen, has helped to revitalize the comic book industry.

7. (a) Like other addictive behaviors, internet addiction may have serious negative consequences, including academic failure, job loss, and a breakdown in personal relationships.
(b) Drug and alcohol addiction is a major problem in the world today, and many people suffer from it.
8. (a) When I was a child I used to visit my grandmother in Moline every Sunday.
(b) Every Sunday we visited my grandmother, who lived in a tiny house that was undeniably haunted.
9. (a) The bicycle was introduced in the nineteenth century and rapidly grew into a worldwide phenomenon.
(b) In several ways, bicycles today are better than they were 100 or even 50 years ago.
10. (a) Although many varieties of beans belong in a healthy diet, among the most nutritious are black beans, kidney beans, chickpeas, and pinto beans.
(b) Although beans are generally good for you, some kinds of raw beans can be dangerous if they're not well cooked.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. (b)
While option (a) states the genre and author of the novel, option (b) posits an overall theme for the novel. This could be made even stronger by providing some examples of HOW this theme is expressed through key elements of the story.
2. (b)
Option (b) makes a more specific statement about the benefits and drawback of cell phone use, while option (a) makes a broad, vague statement that does not give the reader any detail of the argument (no HOW or WHY).
3. (a)
Option (a) asserts that a specific method for finding employment that can be argued and defended, while option (b) simply describes a challenging scenario.
4. (a)
The key word that makes this an argument rather than a fact is the phrase “unjustly,” showing that the author disagrees with documented criticism. This could be followed by an additional sentence naming key reasons WHY these criticisms are unjustified.
5. (b)
Option B is specific, centered on a single adaptation of the novel Dracula. It could be made stronger by giving the reader an idea of WHY those liberties are “considerable.”
6. (b)
Option (b) is more focused on a specific landscape that the iPad has helped revolutionize and provides a reason for WHY it has proved revolutionary.
7. (a)
Option (a) is focused on a specific type of addiction and provides several key points that support the main argument.
8. (b)
Option (b) gives a better idea of the focus and grabs the reader’s attention.
9. (b)
Option (b) asserts an option that bicycles are better today than they were before, while option (a) simply provides background information.
10. (a)
Option (a) provides an opportunity to defend why certain beans are overall more nutritious than others. It could be followed up with the key factors used to determine nutritional value.