

THE THESIS SENTENCE: An Introduction

The **thesis sentence** is the most important sentence in an essay -- the one ruling idea you will support in the body of your paper. It serves as a plan for the writer and a "road map" for the reader. In a sense, it is a contract between the writer and the reader. The writer promises to prove the thesis to the reader.

The thesis is the writer's **opinion** -- an argument, not a fact. Thus, it will have a *limited topic* and one or more *opinion words*. Both of the following sentences have the same *limited topic*-- "The Red-Headed League" -- but only one sentence also has an all-important *opinion* word.

NO "The Red-Headed League" is a short story.

YES "The Red-Headed League" is a **good** short story.

In addition, a thesis sentence usually indicates the minimum number of paragraphs an essay will require. Thus, the sample thesis would be improved by indicating specific components:

"The Red-Headed League" is a **good** story because of
(the suspenseful plot) and (fascinating characters)

Of course, every essay will have an **introduction** and a **conclusion** -- but the number of paragraphs in the body will be determined by *the number of components* in the thesis.

Every Blank = An Essay Component = A Body Paragraph

Part One: The fill-in-the-blank theses below could be used in an informal essay about yourself. On the left, label the number of components promised by each.

1. I can best be described as _____ and _____.
2. I am _____, _____, and _____.
3. Although I see myself as _____, other people may see me as _____.
4. My ability as a _____ comes from _____ and _____.
5. Simple objects, such as _____ and _____, serve as symbols for the most important _____ in my life.
6. Because of _____, I have changed from _____ to _____.
7. I used to be _____; now I am _____; someday I hope to be _____.
8. My three most important goals are to _____, to _____, and to _____.
9. My personality has been shaped by _____, _____, _____, and _____.
10. In the complex life I live, I seem to play many roles: a _____, a _____, and a _____.

Part Two: Now it's your turn to go back to the theses in Part One and fill in the blanks with appropriate words. Remember that the words you choose must express some *opinion*. You are the "I"--so pick words that fit your life. Thinking carefully about each will help you with later assignments.

Part Three: Underline the basic components in the following theses. Then label in the left margin the number of components promised by each thesis.

1. Jabez Wilson may be best characterized as gullible and greedy.
2. Sherlock Holmes is both logical and intuitive.
3. While Dr. Watson is a romantic, Sherlock Holmes is a realist.
4. Sherlock Holmes ability as a detective derives from his powers of observation, his enormous store of knowledge, and his ability to draw logical conclusions.
5. Minor characters, such as Peter Jones, Duncan Ross, and Mr. Wetherby, serve an important function in "The Red-Headed League."
6. Arthur Conan Doyle's choice of Dr. Watson as narrator helps with the characterization of Sherlock Holmes, provides opportunities for foreshadowing, and heightens suspense.
7. "The Red-Headed League" is two stories in one: the story of what happened and the story of what appeared to happen.
8. Successfully reading a mystery like "The Red-Headed League" challenges the reader to be part detective, part eavesdropper, part diviner.
9. Because of his own personality and abilities, Dr. John Watson stands in awe of Sherlock Holmes, but sees deeply into the heart of his friend.
10. Although both Holmes and Watson observe carefully and notice precise details, their differing interpretations of the same information reveal the difference between a "Good Reader" and a "Bad Reader."

Part Four: Select one of the theses you wrote about yourself in Part One and use it as the thesis for your first essay. Copy the thesis sentence you have selected on the index card provided in class. Pick a thesis you can support. Choose carefully since you will share your paper with other students also.

When your thesis is approved by your teacher and your writing group, go on to the Plan Page provided in class.

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| 1. Thesis Approved | _____ | due date |
| 2. Plan Page Completed | _____ | due date |
| 3. Rough Draft Shared | _____ | due date |
| 4. Edited by Group | _____ | due date |
| 5. Revised Final Draft | _____ | due date |