

Thesis Statements

How to Effectively Connect a Text to an Essential Question

How can I write an amazing thesis statement?

A single thesis statement impacts the entire essay's structure; it shows *the **topic** (Essential Question), your own **position** on that topic, and the **progression** of the topic* within the chosen text. So... think about which Essential Question appeals most to you and which text(s) might work best with that particular question to give you the most interesting ideas to explore.

These simple steps, with accompanying considerations, should help you:

Step 1: Unpack the Essential Question

An Essential Question is quite general and can apply to numerous situations and texts. De-construct the question and consider all of its components before making your choice of text(s).

Sample Essential Question: ***How does an individual's perspective of, and response to, a crisis define him or her?***

To unpack or de-construct this Essential Question, you might consider:

- “How” indicates that steps are taken.
- How a specific crisis or series of crises defines an individual.
- The difference between having a *perspective* of a crisis versus *responding* to a crisis. Consider the potential subtleties conveyed.
- How characters are defined, categorized, labelled, or identified.
- To what degree a crisis can enhance one's identity or destroy it.
- Which character(s) are most affected by a crisis?
- What might this topic mean to the author? (Is it convincing? Universal? Relatable?)

The work you put in at this step actually guides the development of your essay the most. Markers are interested in how students connect the topic **to** the text - - not just how the topic is represented in a particular text. It is a subtle difference that can really elevate your essay.

In essence, we are interested in your thoughts first!

Step 2: Consider progression of ideas

What do you want to say about the Essential Question and its connection to the text(s)?

First, consider what ideas will guide the discussion? Possibilities:

- What qualities do individuals have that sets them apart from others during critical moments?
- What is the author trying to convey regarding the defining nature of a crisis?
- What are the potential moral complications that might arise from a crisis?
- Certain individuals might be paralyzed by dilemma and indecision.
- Perhaps you might consider an individual's ability to persevere during tragedy.
- Some characters can easily adapt to changing circumstances and react positively to crises.
- Others might fight for knowledge in order to improve their status in life.
- Some can adapt to predicaments or flee from their outcomes.
- A character's ability to recognize a crisis might be what's important initially.
- The defining moments presented by a crisis might impact entire generations and encourage preservation of valuable heritage.
- An individual might desire to overcome a disaster but not make appropriate decisions to achieve this goal.
- A character might not have the capacity to cope effectively with crisis. He/she might depend on the strength of others during difficult times.
- Individuals might need to learn to accept character flaws or use them to his/her advantage during a crisis.
- Perhaps varying internal and external conflicts offer the greatest challenges for a character.
- Maybe forgiveness is needed after a personal crisis.
- Experiences and upbringing might influence an individual's ability to cope with a crisis.
- An individual's reaction to pressures might offer insight into his/her authentic nature.
- A threatening crisis can greatly influence one's reputation.
- A traumatic crisis can strengthen or weaken one's resolve.
- A character's viewpoint can be forever changed because of a crisis.
- A character might be redeemed because of choices made during a crisis.
- Synonyms for perspective: outlook, viewpoint, perception, attitude, position
- Synonyms for response: reaction, reply, answer
- Synonyms for crisis: catastrophe, disaster, predicament, emergency, dilemma

Next, consider: how is this Essential Question explored in the text?

Use jot notes to help you come up with ideas. *Make lots of notes (probably more than you will actually use).* Generating many ideas will help you discover possible connections and insights you might not have considered before. Think about:

- how the Essential Question might apply to a **character**.
- how a text creator uses particular **writing techniques** which could highlight this question
- how this Essential Question and your ideas about it might apply **beyond the text** (universal idea)

Step 3: Answer the Essential Question in one sentence, using three components in progression, to show your position.

What do you want to state about this topic? How do you want to say it? Consider where you want to end up at the conclusion of the essay. Leave the text title, author, and genre for the introduction and focus on answering the Essential Question in one sentence/statement. The key elements should reveal a natural progression that is echoed in your body paragraphs. Your thesis statement should be a confident reflection of what you want to say in your paper and guide the reader to the expected progression.

Sample thesis statement: *Individuals can be defined during a crisis because of their perception of the threat, their ability to make effective decisions under pressure, and their willingness to support others.*

This thesis statement directly answers the Essential Question, focuses on three components, and suggests a natural progression of development toward a conclusion. Just from this simple statement, we know what each body paragraph will emphasize:

- Body Paragraph 1: *perception of the threat*
- Body Paragraph 2: *ability to make effective decisions under pressure*
- Body Paragraph 3: *willingness to support others*

And therefore: we know basically *where we will end up*, so later, the conclusion will be that much easier to write.