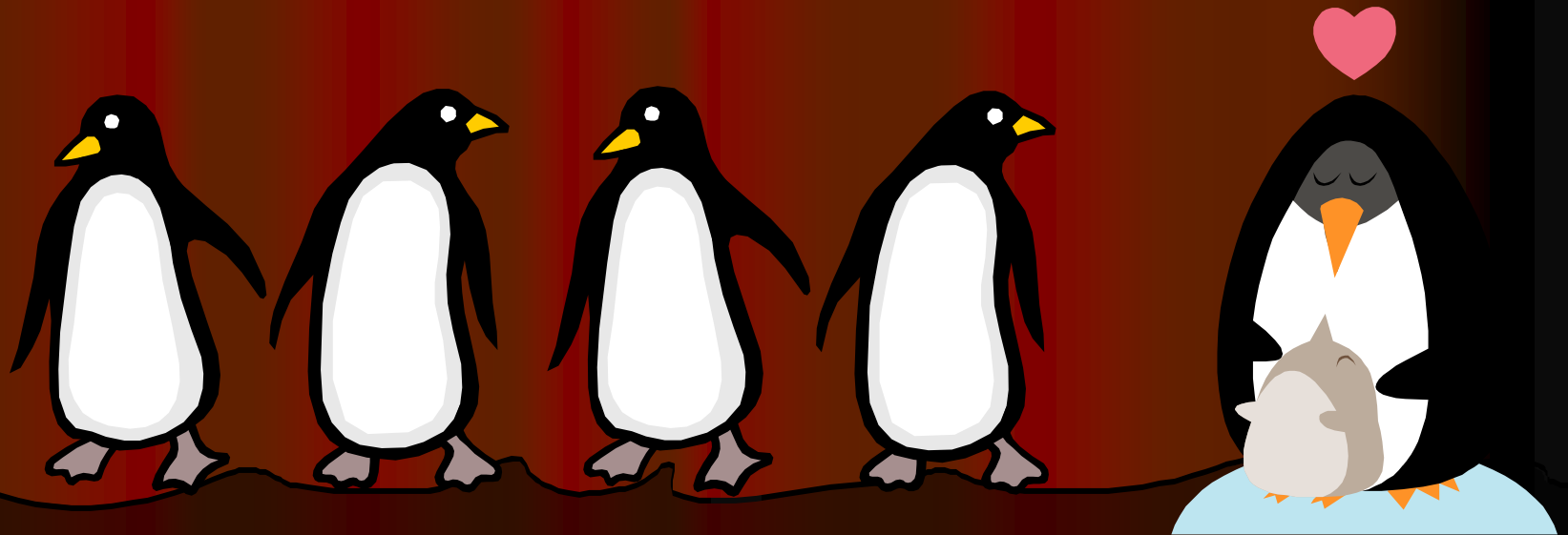


How To Write an A.P. U.S. History Thesis Statement



What is a thesis?

- A thesis statement is the position a student is going to take, the argument that is going to be made.
- It is therefore the answer to the question being asked.

What is not a thesis?

- The thesis statement is not a fact; it is an informed interpretation of the facts.
- Neither is the thesis/argument just an opinion.



Instead, the thesis is the reasoned judgment of the student.

Don't understand the prompt?

- Thesis will not be good = essay flops
- Don't feel like answering the prompt?
- JUST DO IT!
 - Answering the prompt will ensure a fair score
 - Answering the prompt with good/great theses/arguments ensures a much higher score

The Importance of Understanding the Prompt

Many students want to read the question quickly and move on to writing. However, APUSH essay prompts are challenging. They ask students to perform specific writing tasks. The questions also contain qualifiers that guide and restrict your answer. Rather than taking 10 seconds to read the question, you would be better off spending 45 seconds reading, re-reading, marking, and analyzing. Remember, a mistake in understanding a question could make the rest of a student's effort almost worthless.

Break it down like so:

Circle the task at hand
(analyze, assess, compare, etc.)

Underline the historical subject/content

Box out the time period given, or assign one

- Next, brainstorm (in whatever organic way makes sense to you) the information needed to answer the prompt in full.
- Write a thesis statement that demonstrates an argument and the topics to come.
- Double check that your thesis answers all parts of the prompt as you diagrammed it before you begin writing.

Try it!

"The South never had a chance to win the Civil War."

To what extent and why do you agree or disagree with this statement?

**ANTEBELLUM
SOUTH - 1865**

Discuss the political, economic and social reforms introduced in the South between 1864 and 1877. To what extent did these reforms survive the Compromise of 1877?

Thesis Continuum

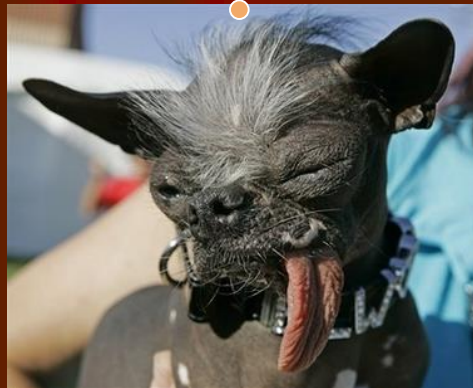
- Most good questions allow for a range of possible answers.
- A continuum exists and students can generally feel free to choose a response along that continuum.
- Students should avoid crafting an extreme response at either end of the continuum.
- Most questions require a response that is not black or white but instead some shade of gray. That does not mean, however, that students should attempt to respond in the exact middle of the continuum. Such an attempt usually results in a failure to articulate a clear position.

Thesis Continuum

I'm
extremely
pro!

I don't
know
what's
going on...

I'm
extremely
con!



A good thesis is narrow but not too narrow

- A well-written thesis statement must be narrow enough to limit the writer to something that can be addressed in about thirty minutes
but
- not so narrow as to prevent them from writing relevant things that help answer the question or that ignore big evidence.
- A thesis that is too broad will cause the student to briefly mention a wide variety of information that may seem unrelated to the reader.

To what extent did Andrew Jackson's presidential policies reveal him to be a man of the people?

- Andrew Jackson was a great president.
- Andrew Jackson's handling of the bank question proved him to be a man of the people.
- Some of Jackson's policies made him a man of the people, but some did not.
- Andrew Jackson's policies concerning the bank, Indian removal and rotation in office proved him to be a man of the people.

Positive Response Bias

- Students should also beware of the fallacy of "positive response bias."
- Many students are inclined to answer a question in the affirmative.
- Students always need to carefully weigh all of the historical evidence and then craft a response that best articulates their understanding of the historical record.

A good thesis shows analysis

- A strong thesis will go beyond a “Miss America” answering of the question.
- Contestants in that pageant will often merely restate the question in the form of a statement and add a couple of words. This rewording of the question is overly simplistic and does not allow the writer to show analysis.
- Readers of the APUSH exam want to see a well-developed thesis that goes beyond simply stating facts or basic opinions about the question. The thesis should help the reader understand why the position is held.

BAD

- *George Washington set precedents as president.*

This is a fact, not an argument.

GOOD

- *The precedents that Washington set as America's first president greatly benefited the American political system.*

This is a clear position that can be supported or opposed.

“Although America perceived Manifest Destiny as a benevolent movement, it was in fact an aggressive imperialism pursued at the expense of others.”

Assess the validity of this statement with specific reference to American expansionism in the 1840s.

WEAK

- *Manifest Destiny was a expansion of American superiority over the continent and affected many.*

BETTER!

- *During the mid 1800s, Manifest Destiny was presented as a positive "benevolent movement," though in reality, it promoted cultural superiority, aggressive foreign policy, and extended the already existing sectional crisis.*
 - A belief in the racial and cultural superiority of white Americans was a tenet of the Manifest Destiny movement.
 - Because it was widely accepted that it was America's destiny, even duty to go west, many accepted aggressive foreign policy as a means of fulfilling that duty.
 - Westward expansion during this era only deepened the debate between North and South: Would there be slavery in the new territories?

SIMPLE yet STRONG

- Manifest Destiny was indeed aggressive in nature, but this position for expansion was a necessary sentiment for congressmen and citizens alike, seeking territorial, financial, and social gain.
- Because it resulted in a brutal Mexican War in which many people lost their lives, the philosophy of Manifest Destiny was indeed an aggressive and selfish phenomenon of the 1840s.

A good thesis may acknowledge the opposing argument

A good thesis allows the writer to show understanding of the complexity of the issue and knowledge of information on both sides of the issue. Most of the essay questions allow for an opinion on either side of the question. By acknowledging another view in the thesis, it becomes possible to add relevant information on that side of the issue.

“Thomas Jefferson is often thought of as an idealist, but as president, he demonstrated his conviction as a pragmatist.” Assess the accuracy of this statement.

- **Although** Jefferson was idealistic in his insistence on an embargo that cut off trade to Europe, he showed himself to be predominantly a pragmatist in the way he handled the Louisiana Purchase, the issue of the constitutionality of the National Bank, and Federalist appointees.
- **Despite** his pragmatic decision to purchase Louisiana, Jefferson proved himself to be primarily an idealist through his handling of the Embargo Act and the national debt.

A good thesis is placed at the end of the introductory paragraph

A well-written thesis is well placed. Some students want to save their thesis for the last paragraph. Perhaps they think that the reader's interest will be held if they create suspense. In reality the reader is more likely to be frustrated as he wonders what you are trying to prove. Another mistake is to put the thesis as the very first sentence of the essay. This placement will not give the reader a chance to get his bearings. Since one of the purposes of a thesis is to clearly lead the reader through your paper, it makes sense to place the thesis where the reader expects to find it. For this reason the best placement is the last sentence of the first paragraph.

Want a formula?

Although.....,

however.....

because.....