

How do you write from scratch an original thesis statement for a literary analysis about a novel or play?

Here are some steps you may want to follow when crafting your introduction and thesis statement. Keep in mind that even though these steps are meant to be in chronological order, you may realize that as you think deeply about your ideas, you'd rather follow these steps in a different order or bring in extra steps of your own. You'll also see that many of these steps overlap.

1. Your thesis must communicate something meaningful about the text that YOU think is worth exploring. If you don't care about your topic, you will find that the experience of writing the paper will be boring, irrelevant, and useless.
2. The thesis must contain your opinion about a character's.....
 - a. actions/thoughts/reactions/misunderstandings/self-deception/flaws/other character traits/ psychological dilemmas/circumstances beyond his control/etc.
 - b. and/or what is done to the character, said to the character, or said about the character...
 - c. so that, when you, later, explore carefully your reasons for your opinion about the character's circumstances, you will also discover something important about what it means to be human. This important "something" about humanity will be the message the author wishes to impart.
 - d. So, look closely, again, at what is specifically going on with a particular character or characters so that you can, later, infer from such circumstances the broader message the author is imparting. After all, the author is using his characters, along with a smorgasbord of literary devices, to communicate his message.
3. To formulate, first, your opinion about the character's circumstances, ask yourself some essential questions about the character:
 - a. Why does the character do/or not do something and what are the reasons for his action/inaction?
 - b. What are the reasons/causes behind a character's thoughts/words? Is the character deluded? Lacking in understanding? What are the consequences of his thoughts/words?
 - c. What ways is the character conflicted and what are the results of such inner conflict?
 - d. What happens when a character's efforts to accomplish a goal aren't effective or miss the mark?
 - e. What ways does a character's flaws affect himself and those around him?
 - f. What ways does chance or circumstance play a role in a character's problem/conflict/downfall/fate, etc?
 - g. How and why do the character's intentions contrast with what the results of his intentions turn out to be?
 - e. How and why do other characters' words/actions affect the character?
 - f. What circumstances cause the character's view of the world/himself to change? And how do these particular changes affect the character's thoughts/actions?

4. Now, write in a statement the first “piece” of your thesis. In this statement, give your opinion about the characters’ specific circumstances, naming the characters specifically and identifying the particular circumstances. (If you’re writing a cause and effect essay, give your opinion in cause and effect format. Think: because character so-and-so does X, Y is the result.)
5. Find all of the examples in the text that support the opinion statement you have just written.
 - a. As you search for supporting examples, look also for literary devices that, by joining the characters’ actions, words, and thoughts, give support to your opinion statement. Look for literary devices—like irony, metaphor, motif, diction, setting, literary or mythological allusion, etc.—that, again, assist in supporting your opinion.
 - b. Write all of your examples down, making sure you include page numbers and/or line numbers so that you can easily and quickly refer back to the full passages.
 - c. Now, look carefully at the examples and see the ways each one is similar or different from the other examples. Even though they all support your opinion, some are more similar to each other than others, so make three categories of examples—so that each category contains those examples most related by theme, idea, or circumstance. You will use each one of the three sub-groups to create a topic sentence for one body paragraph.
6. Now, it’s time to look at your opinion statement and all of your examples to determine (from your careful observations and inferences) what you believe the author’s message to be. Add words to the first “piece” of your thesis or opinion statement that explain how you have inferred, from the character’s circumstances, the author’s message about humanity. (You may need to do this in two-three sentences, rather than just one.)
7. Now, craft with care your entire thesis and introduction. Together, they should include....
 - a. the title and author of the novel or play
 - b. the names of the character or characters you want to write about
 - c. your “in a nutshell” opinion about what and/or why the character does/thinks/feels/says what he does/thinks/feels/says (If a cause and effect paper, make sure the cause and effect are clearly stated) (PART OF “THE WHAT”)
 - d. the author’s “in a nutshell” message (THE OTHER PART OF “THE WHAT”) that you have inferred from...
 1. the character’s actions/words/thoughts/others’ comments about the character
 2. any literary devices associated with the character
 - e. a phrase that gives reference to the ways your selected, textual examples will in the rest of your paper 1) prove your opinion about the character’s circumstances and 2) convey the author’s message (“THE HOW”)

