

Thesis Statements

The thesis statement can occasionally follow the second paragraph, but for a short paper, the thesis almost always comes at the end of the first paragraph. According to John Ramage and John Bean, the thesis for the paper should be “surprising,” meaning that readers cannot predict in advance what you will be saying. (“Surprising” does not mean that your thesis is so outlandish that no one would possibly agree with it.) Ramage and Bean explain that the thesis should be argumentative, take a risk, or be contestable.” The best way to make a surprising thesis is to give it what Ramage and Bean call “tension.”

An easy way for a thesis to exhibit tension is to concede some points that work against your thesis. Then make your claim and provide reasons (proof) that support that claim. It is possible to do this in three sentences. For example, if you wanted to develop a response that worked with the grain, you could start first by conceding that the text has some problems. Then you could make your main statement, which supports the author’s ideas and shows how they are consistent with your own experience. Finally, you could provide some specific areas of agreement and features of the text that you particularly like.

It is true that [author’s last name] fails to _____. However, the text is successful/convincing/compelling/interesting in the way that it _____. I especially like _____, _____, and _____.

However, it often works better to do all of the three tasks in the same sentence that starts with although:

Although [author’s last name] neglects/ignores/passes too quickly over _____, [author’s last name] offers a compelling sent of reasons for _____: [list the reasons] _____, _____, and _____.

Alternatively, you could use however:

[Author’s last name] is not successful at _____; however, [Author’s last name]’s argument is nevertheless persuasive in _____ because _____, _____, and _____.

If your response was basically against the grain, you would start first by pointing to aspects of the text that were good, followed by your thesis and reasons. Again, you could use either one of these three forms:

[Author’s last name] makes a good case for _____. However, the argument fails at _____. These problems appear to be the result of _____, _____, and _____.

Although [author’s last name] does an excellent job of _____, [author’s last name] fails to completely convince us that _____ because _____, _____, and _____.

[Author’s last name] is very successful at _____; however, [author’s last name]’s argument is unconvincing in _____ because _____, _____, and _____.