

Essay Components

This essay components guide is designed to give you a briefing of the main structural elements of an essay, including the thesis statement, topic sentences, supporting points, and the supporting paragraph as a whole.

The Thesis Statement

How to Write a Good Thesis Statement

In order to create a strong thesis statement, it is necessary to keep in mind its specific features:

- A good thesis statement is always an affirmation.
- It does not make an announcement or ask a question but asserts a definite point of view.
- It should always reveal a plan of development in its contents; reveal what concrete arguments will be analyzed in the paper.
- The thesis statement needs to correspond to the length of the paper. If it is very long and the paper is limited to three pages it is impossible to prove it and to persuade the reader that the author has a point.

A short thesis statement → short essay

A substantial thesis statement → long essay

- It can be neither too narrow nor too broad.
- A thesis statement does not present the author's point as a subjective position but as an argument to prove.

The thesis statement itself gives the direction and the jumping-off point for the essay. That is the reason it is so important to make it right as the professionalism of the future essay absolutely depends on it.

Thesis Components

1. The Thesis Statement should make a claim.

Example: Nadine Gordimer speaks out against Apartheid.

- A Thesis Statement should not make an announcement.

Example: In this essay I am going to prove that Nadine Gordimer speaks out against Apartheid.

- A Thesis Statement should not ask a question.

Example: Does Nadine Gordimer speak out against Apartheid?

2. The Thesis Statement should include either a plan of development or a non-specific and plural word that suggests a plan of development.

What is a plan of development?

- A plan of development consists of a sentence which briefly mentions the elements you will elaborate in your essay. Each element will be sufficiently examined in its own supporting paragraph or set of supporting paragraphs. Essentially, a plan of development is a blue-print map of your essay.

Example 1: Nadine Gordimer speaks out against the racism, capitalism, and censorship of Apartheid.

Example 2: Nadine Gordimer speaks out against three attributes of Apartheid.

- A Thesis Statement may also satisfy this requirement if the claim is written in such a way that it would raise a specific question in the reader's mind that would include a non-specific and plural word that suggests a plan of development. Observe, in the example given below, that the implicit question for the reader is, "In what ways does Gordimer speak out against Apartheid?"

Example 1: Nadine Gordimer speaks out against Apartheid.

How to create a plan of development:

1. Decide on and list the elements that you will be using to support your thesis.
2. Condense these elements into short phrases which give concise information.
3. Write out a parallel sentence which includes these phrases.
4. For short essays, make sure to attach the plan of development to the thesis.

Tip: Do not explain too much. This is the purpose of the body paragraphs. If you give too much information about your proofs in the introduction, you will run out of things to say in the body and will ultimately become repetitious.

Plan of Development Examples:

Example 1: The antagonist lacks **courage, honesty, and imagination**.
(all nouns)

Example 2: The antagonist is **courageous, honest, and imaginative**.
(all adjectives)

3. The writer should be able to adequately develop the Thesis Statement within the length of the essay.

- **The Thesis Statement should not be too narrow.** Statements that are too narrow are often statements of fact that require little proof or can be adequately substantiated within a single paragraph.

Example: Nadine Gordimer is the author of eight novels.

- **The Thesis Statement should not be too broad.** Statements that are too broad often contain more than one idea. Observe, in the example given below, that the thesis can be divided into two separate statements: (1) "Gordimer's eight novels speak out against Apartheid," (2) Gordimer speaks out against Apartheid in different ways." Broad statements may require the writing of a book instead of an essay.

Example: Nadine Gordimer's eight novels speak out against Apartheid in different ways.

4. As a general rule, Thesis Statements should not include your subjective self.

The reader already knows that your thesis is *your* argument, that it is what *you* believe. Even so, if the thesis is worth arguing, it should be written as a factual claim, with confidence.

Example: *I think (or I believe or I feel) that Nadine Gordimer speaks out against Apartheid. (Omit the words in italics.)*

Topic Sentences

1. Topic Sentences should follow the plan of development given in the Thesis Statement or answer the question that is implicit within the Thesis Statement.

Example 1:

Thesis: Nadine Gordimer speaks out against the racism, capitalism, and censorship of Apartheid.

Topic Sentence #1: First, Gordimer uses her skills as a writer to attack racism and the government that supports it.

Example 2:

Thesis: Nadine Gordimer speaks out against Apartheid.

Topic Sentence #1: One way that Gordimer speaks out against Apartheid is by using her skills as a writer to attack its racist policies.

2. Topic Sentences should include either a plan of development or a non-specific and plural word that suggests a plan of development.

Example 1: First, Gordimer uses her skills as a writer to attack racism within the legal system and within the press of Apartheid.

Example 1: One way that Gordimer attacks Apartheid is by using her pen as a sword against its two heads of racism.

3. Topic Sentences should be developed in a parallel fashion.

Parallel does not mean *identical*; it means that there should be sufficient similarity in the structure and representation of ideas to inform the reader where you are in your overall plan of development.

Example:

Topic Sentence #1: First, Gordimer uses her skills as a writer to attack Apartheid's racism within its legal system and within its press.

Topic Sentence #2: Second, as a writer, Gordimer uses her trade to attack Apartheid's capitalistic exploitation of the working class in general and of the black people specifically.

4. Each Topic Sentence should be introduced by a transition.

- Transitional adverbs (e.g., "First," "Then," "Finally")
- Transitional adjectives (e.g., "One . . .," "Another . . .," "The last . . .")
- Transitional dependent clauses (e.g., "Not only does Gordimer attack racism, . . .")

Supporting Points

1. Supporting Points should follow the plan of development given in the Topic Sentence or answer the question that is implicit within the Topic Sentence.

Example 1:

Topic Sentence: First, Gordimer uses her skills as a writer to attack racism and the government that supports it.

Supporting Point #1: Her novels present racism, wherever it is found, as an evil.

Supporting Point #2: Nevertheless, her political essays take direct and lethal aim at the racist government of Apartheid.

Example 2:

Topic Sentence: One way that Gordimer speaks out against Apartheid is by using her skills as a writer to attack its racist policies.

Supporting Point #1: One of the policies that she has exposed and denounced is

Supporting Point #2: Another policy that Gordimer has reviled in the press is . .

Note: These Supporting Points in Example 2 answer the implicit question, "What racist policies has Gordimer used her skills to attack?" However, the presence of another plural, non-specific word in the Topic Sentence, "skills," suggests an alternative implicit question: "What writing skills does Gordimer use to attack Apartheid's racist policies?" Be sure that all of your Supporting Points answer the same implicit question.

2. There should never be only one Supporting Point for a Topic Sentence.

Supporting Points are always followed by specific, concrete details, examples, or illustrations. When a Topic Sentence does not call for multiple Supporting Points, you may use instead one or more detailed examples or illustrations.

3. Supporting Points should be developed in a parallel fashion.

Example:

Topic Sentence: First, Gordimer uses her skills as a writer to attack Apartheid's racism within its legal system and within its press.

Supporting Point #1: She has been an outspoken advocate of those who have been oppressed by the government's white laws.

Supporting Point #2: Furthermore, she has been a fierce opponent against the suppression of information by the government's white news.

4. Transition words should mark the movement from one Supporting Point to another.

The Supporting Paragraph

The main body of an essay consists of supporting paragraphs. These paragraphs are referred to as "supporting" because they are subordinate to and serve the Thesis Statement. Each supporting paragraph is a hierarchical unit of ideas consisting of the following parts:

1. Topic Sentences
2. Supporting Points
3. Specific Details
4. Concluding Point

Below is an example of a Thesis Statement followed by a supporting paragraph. Each part within the paragraph has been numbered as above in order to facilitate recognition.

Thesis Statement: As a literary artist and political activist, Nadine Gordimer admirably speaks out against the racism, capitalism, and censorship of Apartheid.

(1.) First, Gordimer uses her skills as a writer to attack Apartheid's racism within its legal system and within its press. (2.) She has been an outspoken advocate of those who have been oppressed by the government's white laws. (3.) For example, in the 1950's, she supported Chief Luthuli, who had been placed under a government ban, even though — or perhaps, because — he was the only recognized spokesperson for the thousands of native Africans within his reserve. (2.) Furthermore, Gordimer has been a fierce opponent against the suppression of information by the government's white news. (3.) Her efforts to inform the world of the true extent of racist oppression in South Africa have placed her outside of the law many times, while the government control over the press has forced her into sneaking documents passed the censors into England. (4.) As a white woman, Gordimer has conscientiously used the power and privilege of her white identity in the effort to transfer that power and privilege to the black majority.