



The Essay: Getting Started With a Thesis

Let's face it, when students are asked to write an essay for a history or social studies class, a feeling of dread sometimes follows the teacher's assignment. This is often because we fear the process of writing an essay or research project. For help getting through this process, read through the following tips. They might make essay writing a little easier for you.

First Things First: The Process

One thing to remember is that an essay is a process. There are steps to follow that will help. Trying to get things done all at once will make it difficult, so try to think of your essay in small parts. This will make things easier and make the essay writing process seem less overwhelming.

A Quick Note About Your Topic

Where possible, negotiate with your teacher for an essay topic that interests you. Try to choose a topic that suits you. Ask your teacher if there is any room to slightly change a topic, if necessary.

Writing A Thesis

Most essays have a thesis, which is essentially an "argument." Before writing your essay, you need to think about what it is you want to say. What argument are you going to make? For example, if you were writing about Canada and the First World War, maybe you need to make an argument about what battle was the most significant for the country. In that case, your thesis might resemble this one:

"Of all the battles in which Canada participated during the First World War, it is clear that the Battle of Vimy Ridge was the most significant."

Note that the thesis is a clear argument that is one sentence long. You can do a self-check to see if your thesis is an argument by asking yourself this: "Could anyone argue with what I wrote?" If no one can argue with your statement, then perhaps you did not write a thesis. For example:

The Battle of Vimy Ridge took place on 9 April 1917 when four divisions of the Canadian Corps battled the Germans.

This is a statement of fact, not an argument.



TIP:

Still stuck? Sometimes it's better to write the very first sentence last. Think about how you would casually explain your topic to your friend, brother or sister. Write that down the way you would say it. That will get you started, and you can clean up the paragraph as you edit your essay. Don't worry about fancy words or sounding eloquent, you just need to get started!

Remember that a thesis comes at the end of your first or introductory paragraph. You will need to write a few sentences of introduction before your thesis to tell the reader about your topic.



- It is sometimes useful to think of the first paragraph as an upside down triangle.
- Essay begins with general ideas about the topic – the wide part of the triangle.
- The introduction gradually gets more specific and concludes with your thesis, which is a very precise statement of your argument.

For tips on writing the body of your essay be sure to check out
The Essay: Writing Body Paragraphs Learning Tool