

Exercise walk-through

Writing a thesis statement ■ 4.4

eXercise

You must be able to

- write a thesis narrow enough to defend in the space available
- revise a thesis after drafting if the argument has moved
- avoid a thesis that promises more than the essay delivers
- test a thesis against your own paragraph claims

Method — Scope

A thesis must be defensible in the length available. “Education should be reformed” cannot be. “Timed exams measure a skill that no job requires” can be, in an essay.

Method — Revising after drafting

Arguments move while being written. If your last paragraph makes a claim the thesis did not promise, change the thesis — it is the cheapest repair and the most commonly skipped.

Method — Not promising too much

A thesis claiming three things and an essay defending one is a broken promise the reader notices. Claim what you will actually argue.

Method — Testing against paragraphs

List your paragraph claims. If one does not serve the thesis, either it goes or the thesis changes. Both are legitimate; leaving the mismatch is not.

Practice 2.1 ■ 2 marks

State what makes a thesis appropriately scoped.

Solution 2.1

Method: Revising after drafting

Worked steps

it is narrow enough to be defended in the space available **B1** and still disputable **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

State what to do when the drafted essay outruns the thesis.

Solution 2.2

Worked steps

revise the thesis to match the argument actually made **B1**, rather than leaving the mismatch **B1**.

Practice 2.3 ■ 1 mark

Thesis: “School uniforms are harmful.” The essay argues only about cost.

- (a) Name the problem.
- (b) State two possible fixes.

Solution 2.3

Worked steps

(a) the thesis promises more than the essay delivers **B1**. (b) narrow the thesis to cost **B1**; or add the arguments the thesis promised **B1**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

A thesis that promises three arguments in an essay that makes one is

- A** appropriately broad
- B** a broken promise the reader notices
- C** well scoped
- D** a concession

Solution 3.1

- A appropriately broad
- B a broken promise the reader notices
- C well scoped
- D a concession



Worked steps

B. the reader is told to expect three and given one.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

The cheapest repair when an essay has moved beyond its thesis is to

- A** delete the essay
- B** revise the thesis
- C** add a conclusion
- D** change the title

Solution 3.2

Method: Revising after drafting

A delete the essay

B revise the thesis 

C add a conclusion

D change the title

Worked steps

B. changing one sentence is cheaper than rewriting the argument.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 2 marks

Prompt: “Is it right to require volunteering for graduation?”

- (a) Write a thesis you could defend in five paragraphs.
- (b) List the paragraph claims that would serve it.

Solution 3.3

Method: Testing against paragraphs

Worked steps

(a) a specific, defensible thesis **B2**. (b) two or three paragraph claims, each of which serves it **B2**.