

4.3 Identifying the overarching thesis

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 11 marks

Objective

Build the skills to identify a thesis in a passage with **competing candidates**.

You must be able to:

- distinguish the thesis from a strongly worded sub-claim
- test candidates against the whole passage
- state a thesis in one sentence in your own words
- explain why the weaker candidate is subordinate

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Strong wording is not the test

The most emphatic sentence is often a sub-claim: writers raise their voice where they expect resistance. The thesis is the claim everything else serves, whether or not it is the loudest.

■ Testing candidates

Take two candidates and ask of each paragraph which it supports. The one supported throughout is the thesis; the other will be supported by a section.

■ Saying why

An answer that only names the thesis is incomplete. Say what the rejected candidate does instead — usually it is one step in the argument for the real thesis.

2 Practice

2.1 State why the most emphatic sentence may not be the thesis. [2]

2.2 State the test for choosing between two candidate theses. [2]

2.3 A passage's boldest sentence is supported by two paragraphs; a quieter one by all six.

(a) State which is the thesis. [1]

(b) State the role of the other. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Writers often raise their voice where they expect [1]

- **A** agreement
- **B** resistance
- **C** boredom
- **D** confusion

3.2 The thesis is the claim that [1]

- **A** is stated most forcefully
- **B** everything else in the passage serves
- **C** appears first
- **D** is longest

3.3 Two candidate theses are each supported by half the passage.

(a) State what this suggests. [1]

(b) Explain how you would resolve it.

[2]

Solutions

2.1 emphasis marks where resistance is expected, which is often a sub-claim rather than the overall argument.

2.2 ask of each paragraph which candidate it supports; the one supported throughout is the thesis.

2.3 (a) the quieter one. (b) it is a sub-claim — a step in the argument for the thesis.

3.1 B. emphasis anticipates objection.

3.2 B. subordination, not volume, identifies the thesis.

3.3 (a) that the real thesis is a claim that includes both. (b) construct a single sentence that both halves support and test it against every paragraph.