

Writing a Sharply-Focused Thesis

It has been said that if you have no purpose you cannot arrive at your destination. For example, if you go on a driving trip in your country and you are unfamiliar with the different roads, you will most likely use a map. Or at least you will ask someone for directions if you get lost. If you do not do either of these, it will be difficult for you to find your way. Thus, it would be wise for you to plan your trip beforehand, so you can make the best use of your time.

Like planning a trip, a thesis is a plan for writing. It lets you and the reader know where you are going. It helps the reader know what to expect in the essay, so he does not get lost. A thesis gives purpose to your writing; and at the same time, it allows you to make the most efficient use of your time during the thirty minutes that you have to write a TWE. As a result, in addition to understanding the writing prompt, it is equally important to write a clear and effective thesis which is organized around the question so that you can announce the different parts of your essay.

There are three main steps in developing a good thesis: 1). Read and decode the question 2). Create a short shopping list based on the key points in the question. 3). Restate the question in the form of a thesis while including in the thesis the main points from your shopping list.

Creating a Shopping List

Some people bring a shopping list when they buy groceries. This type of person goes into the kitchen and takes inventory of what is in the refrigerator, the pantry, and the cupboards. He writes down what is missing (i.e., sugar, bread, flour, cereal, peanut butter, rice, and so on). Then he brings the list of needed items to the grocery store and buys those products. In the long run, he has saved time since he can focus on searching for the items and not on trying to remember whether or not he has a particular item already at the house. He has also saved money since he does not buy any unnecessary items that are already in the house.

A shopping list for writing helps you limit your focus so that you have enough time to adequately develop a topic. It will prevent you from saying unnecessary or irrelevant things in your essay. The shopping list will help you to support your general statements with detail statements. In addition, a shopping list will give your writing a clear pattern of organization.

But how much should you write in an essay? How many details should you include? A good rule to remember is that you should write at three levels: main idea, support idea, and sub-support ideas. It is generally wise to give at least two details (sub-support ideas) to support your support ideas. Consider the following three kinds of prompts and their accompanying shopping lists.

Some people say that it is best to be loyal and to work for one company during one's life. Others take the opposite view and say it is better to change jobs frequently in one's life. Discuss these positions, using specific examples of both. Then tell which one you agree with and explain why.

There are three basic parts to this question. (1) You must write about why some people say that it is best to be loyal to work for one company during one's life; (2) you must write about why others say it is better to change jobs frequently in one's life; (3) you must tell which one of the positions you agree with. Briefly, you should write them down. Then you should list least two sub-support points under each heading.

Main Idea: Some are loyal; others change jobs a lot		
Support idea: Discuss being loyal to one company.	Support idea: Discuss changing jobs frequently.	Support idea: Discuss which view you support (being loyal to one company).
Sub-support idea: Job security.	Sub-support idea: More varied experience.	Sub-support idea: Less stress.
Sub-support idea: Good benefits package.	Sub-support idea: Increase salary.	Sub-support idea: Better relationship with boss and co-workers.

In this example, the writer has an organizational pattern which clearly organizes around the writing prompt. It was easy to create this shopping list since the writing assignment had a very specific organizational pattern. And it only took the writer about a minute to do this part of the prewriting!

In addition to their specialized classes in their major, students should also be required to take general education classes in a university. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons to support your opinion.

There are two basic parts to this question: 1). whether you agree or disagree and 2). that you give reasons to support your example. In this case, you should state a position and give three supporting reasons. Briefly, you should write them down. Then you should list least two sub-support points under each heading. Hence, your shopping list would look something like this:

Main Idea: General education classes should not be required		
Support idea: Too expensive.	Support idea: Time consuming.	Support idea: Not job related.
Sub-support idea: Makes tuition for college 40% more expensive for students.	Sub-support idea: A student could graduate in two or three years instead of four.	Sub-support idea: Sociology is not related to accounting.
Sub-support idea: More professors need to be hired, which costs university money.	Sub-support idea: Students must spend a lot of time on unnecessary classes.	Sub-support idea: Why does a computer engineer need to take Philosophy?

In this example, the writer has an organizational pattern which clearly organizes around the writing prompt. This shopping list took the writer approximately two minutes to write.

Or you could give two reasons (i.e., support statements) while listing three sub-support points under each heading, in which case your shopping list would look something like this:

Main Idea: General education classes should not be required	
Support idea: Too expensive	Support idea: Time consuming
Sub-support idea: Makes tuition for college 40% more expensive for students	Sub-support idea: A student could graduate in two or three years instead of four.
Sub-support idea: More professors need to be hired, which costs university money	Sub-support idea: Students must spend a lot of time on unnecessary classes.
Sub-support idea: The extra books and other materials for general education classes cost the student money.	Support idea: Professor spend too much time on teaching optional classes and not enough time on conducting research in their field.

In this example, the writer also has an organizational pattern which clearly organizes around the writing prompt. Perhaps in this case, the writer could only think of two strong reasons but was able to think of adequate details to support the reasons. This shopping list took the writer approximately two minutes to write.

To help inspire your creativity, it is helpful to read newspapers, novels, and magazines in English, so you can become familiar with the culture of English: customs, behaviors, issues, movies, singers, and politicians. Extensively reading in English will also help you to translate less in your native language, hence helping you to think of ideas more quickly in English.

The automobile and the airplane are important inventions of the 20th century. Both of these inventions have had an important effect on our lives. Choose another invention that you think is important. Give specific reasons for your choice.

There is one part to this question: 1). choose another important invention and explain why. Even though this is a very broad topic, your readers expect that you will have a very limited focus. Briefly, you should list an invention with which you are very familiar. Then you should give three reasons (i.e., support statements). Next you should list two sub-support points under each heading. Hence, your shopping list would look something like this:

Main Idea: The Internet		
Support idea: Education/coursework for college students more accessible	Support idea: Makes it easier to market products internationally	Support idea: Improves people's health
Sub-support idea: Easier access to research for writing college essays	Sub-support idea: E-bay allows a person to sell things to anyone anywhere in the world.	Sub-support idea: People can lost weight
Sub-support idea: Online classes/distance learning are becoming more available to students who cannot travel to school.	Sub-support idea: E-commerce Web Sites allows a person to have contact with potential clients in many countries.	Sub-support idea: People can become more aware and learn how to prevent, detect, and treat cancer and other diseases.

Or you could give two reasons (i.e., support statements) while listing three sub-support points under each heading, in which case your shopping list would look something like this:

Main Idea: The Internet	
Support idea: Education/coursework for college students is more accessible.	Support idea: Makes it easier to market products internationally.
Sub-support idea: Easier access to research for writing college essays.	Sub-support idea: E-bay allows a person to sell antique vases from my country of Japan to people in the U.S.
Sub-support idea: Online classes/distance learning are becoming more available to students who cannot travel to school.	Sub-support idea: E-commerce Web Sites in Taiwan can sell products (i.e., sweaters, slacks) to England and other countries, allowing a person to have contact with potential clients in many countries.
Sub-support idea: BA, MA, and PhD degrees are easier to get due to the Internet.	Sub-support idea: For example, it is easier to sell bicycles using the Internet since there is a wider audience.

In this example, the writer also has an organizational pattern which clearly organizes around the writing prompt. Perhaps in this case, the writer could only think of two strong reasons but was able to think of adequate details to support the reasons. This shopping list took the writer approximately two minutes to write.