

How to state a thesis about an essay

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Dance with a Giraffe” by Christine Jurzykowski**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **20 minutes**

Reminder

What is a thesis statement about an essay? Your thesis statement should include and explain your response to the essay you have chosen to write about. Generally, the term “response” refers to a position that agrees, disagrees or reacts to some of the major ideas put forth in the essay. Graders normally expect to find a student’s thesis statement in the opening paragraph of the essay.

How long is a thesis statement? A thesis statement usually includes a reaction and/or response to a main idea identified in the essay. One sentence is usually enough, but keep in mind that you have four hours in all and that you must write a 750-word essay. Try to make a thesis statement that is not too broad, so that you can support and develop it within the time and word-number constraints of the exam.

What does a thesis statement express? You have to do more than make a pronouncement or declare a position on the essay. You should clearly explain and state your reaction, setting up the theme you have identified and chosen to write about. A student thesis can also centre on an essay’s organizational pattern, such as techniques used by the author to present ideas. Your thesis statement should clearly identify the focus of your essay, your reaction to the author’s main ideas and theme, or your interpretation of the reading.

The “Writing Guidelines,” an important component of the Exit Exam documents, ask you to identify a main idea in the essay and to structure your own essay around a thesis statement that expresses your understanding of the observations or point of view presented in the essay you are writing about.

Instructions

This exercise will help you distinguish an acceptable thesis statement from an unacceptable one as a reaction-response to an essay you have chosen to write about.

Read the following sentences and identify them as acceptable or unacceptable thesis statements by placing an X following the correct answer.

Exercise 3

1. The author uses a very personal tone and simple diction to present her feelings and her sadness at the death of an animal at Fossil Reserve.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

2. Christine Jurzykowski uses the occasion of the death of one animal she is very attached to in order to remind us we are all part of the natural cycle, that death is inevitable for all humans and animals, and that we can learn from animals the value of life.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

3. “Dance with a Giraffe” is mainly about the mistreatment of animals, especially exotic animals, in zoos and how they are left to suffer in the end when their time comes.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

4. This boring essay is all about the death of a giraffe no one cares about, especially most readers who will read the essay.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

5. The issues of caring for neglected, sick or unwanted animals is interesting, but taking care of humans in similar situations is much more important and I will explain why what the author is doing is just a waste of time.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

6. Jurzykowski has written an amazing and emotional essay that makes us think about how animals have a sixth sense and sometimes a means of communication that humans cannot help but wonder about.

Acceptable _____ Unacceptable _____

7. “Dance with a Giraffe” is a perfect example, in the death of the giraffe, of cruelty to animals and how we abuse animals in testing cosmetics and drugs for human use, which is a terrible thing to do to any animal, but we do it just the same. I will give you more examples of the dangers of animals testing.

Acceptable_____ Unacceptable_____

8. Ms. Jurzykowski explains the importance of travel in a person’s life and how travel can lead to a better understanding of animals because this is how we can see their real habitats.

Acceptable_____ Unacceptable_____

9. This essay is all about friendship, even friendship with animals, and the author has used the recurring theme of “You are my friend...you will be taken care of.” We should all adopt this attitude to both humans and animals.

Acceptable_____ Unacceptable_____

10. Animals suffer too.

Acceptable_____ Unacceptable_____

Answer key

1. **Acceptable.** This thesis statement represents a valid approach where the student has announced a plan to build an essay around two techniques used by the author to present her feelings about the events she has witnessed.
2. **Acceptable.** While not everyone might agree that the three themes mentioned by the student are the only major concerns expressed in the “Dance with a Giraffe” essay, they do represent sensible and acceptable ideas. The student seems to be reacting to and agreeing with what the author is saying.
3. **Unacceptable.** The student takes a position on an issue raised through the “Giraffe” essay, but cruelty to animals is only an indirect theme, and this particular animal is not left to die in pain all alone. An essay on this thesis might well be judged off-topic.
4. **Acceptable.** While this seems to be a simplistic, negative, and “gut-feeling” reaction to the essay, it does contain an opinion on the relevance of the topic, an identification of a main idea within the essay, and what could be the basis of an acceptable response essay if the student makes it clear what exactly is “boring” in the style in terms of techniques used, in addition to why the author fails to get the reader’s attention. Everything depends on how capably the student backs up the claim.
5. **Unacceptable.** The essay does not say that taking care of such neglected and unwanted animals is more important than doing the same for humans. In fact, what the author is saying is that being more aware of all living things and their place in the life cycle makes us all more aware of the place of all living things in the life cycle, including humans. A student essay that discusses only mistreatment of humans (i.e., the homeless, poverty cases, welfare families) might be getting too far away from the major concerns of the “Dance with a Giraffe” essay and might be considered off-topic by graders.
6. **Acceptable.** Here the student’s thesis has both a response to an idea in the essay and an evaluation of the structure and overall impact of the essay on a potential reader.

7. **Unacceptable.** The student’s essay might be interesting but it will probably be considered off-topic in terms of a response to the “Dance with a Giraffe” essay. Mistreatment and abuse of animals is not a major theme of the original essay. The opposite approach is valued and any response must take this into account.
8. **Unacceptable.** This is not a sensible thesis that includes a reaction or response to the observations by Jurzykowski in her essay. Travel is indeed mentioned in the essay at the beginning, but it is not part of her major ideas and themes presented. A student response centred on travel would be considered off-topic.
9. **Acceptable.** Introduces an idea clearly expressed through the essay and includes a position on a theme the author is presenting.
10. **Unacceptable.** This is more of a main idea in the essay than a thesis statement which includes a student’s understanding of the author’s account of her experiences. A thesis statement has to take a main idea in a text one step further from the summary level to the reaction-response level.

How to state a thesis about an essay

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Dance with a Giraffe” by Christine Jurzykowski**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **15 minutes**

Reminder

A thesis statement should include and explain the focus of your response to the essay you have chosen to write about. It should set out a position that agrees or disagrees with some of the major ideas put forth in the essay.

Generally, the term “response” refers to a reaction to the ideas presented in the essay or to literary techniques used by the essay writer, including argumentation techniques, use of a personal voice, control of tone, examples and contrasts, or rhetorical questions to get ideas across. Choose two or three techniques you feel help to explain your thesis.

The “Writing Guidelines,” an important component of the Exit Exam documents, ask you to identify a main idea in the essay and to structure your own essay around a thesis statement that expresses your understanding of the observations or point of view presented in the essay you are writing about.

Instructions

Now that we have examined examples of acceptable and unacceptable thesis statements about the essay “Dance with a Giraffe” in Exercise 3, you must write your own thesis statement to form the basis of your own essay. Following the steps in this exercise will help you organize your ideas into a valid thesis statement of your own choosing.

This exercise presents a three-step approach that you can use to help you write a valid thesis statement. Step 1 asks you to list three main ideas in the text you are writing about. Step 2 has you centre on one of those ideas and what you want to do with it. Step 3 asks you to write an actual thesis statement that will become the focus of your essay.

Exercise 4

STEP 1

List up to three main ideas, three major topics, or three unifying observations you have identified in the essay “Dance with a Giraffe.” You may draw on ideas from other practice exercises or simply work with your own reading of Jurzykowski’s essay

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Answer key

STEP 1

Here are some examples of main ideas in the essay “Dance with a Giraffe.” You might have listed others and they will be valid and acceptable, as long as they are important ideas raised by Jurzykowski in her observations.

- Live and let live... live and let die
- All living things should take care of one another
- The sad death of a noble animal along with human and animal reactions to what is happening
- The need for a place, a reserve for the many suffering and abandoned animals
- Animals can suffer as much as humans
- All living things are important and part of the life cycle
- Experiencing death, courage in the face of death
- Humans versus other species on earth
- Harmony of nature
- Man and nature

STEP 2

Your thesis must reflect your own take, your own reaction to the ideas, themes, and observations you have identified, and your own interpretation of the “Dance with a Giraffe” text. What you write in response to the themes and observations about the world that Jurzykowski makes in her original essay should be your own reactions expressed in your own way. They will be valid and considered acceptable as long as they make sense, and as long as they reflect themes and concerns in her essay. The list above makes it clear that, as is the case with most good essays, there is a good variety of topics to choose from.

STEP 3

Be sure your thesis statement indicates where you are going in your essay. It should comment directly on central ideas in “Dance with a Giraffe” and make a claim that is neither too broad nor too narrow for development in a 750-word essay.

Go back and look at the acceptable thesis statements in Exercise 3 and compare them to your own thesis statement. You may have come up with something quite similar or at least comparable.