

How To Write an A.P. U.S. History Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is the position a student is going to take, the argument that is going to be made. It is therefore the answer to the question being asked. As such, the thesis statement is not a fact; it is an informed interpretation of the facts. Neither is the thesis statement just an opinion. Rather the thesis is the reasoned judgment of the student. Most good questions allow for a range of possible answers. In other words, a continuum exists and students can generally feel free to choose a response along that continuum. However, students should avoid crafting an extreme response at either end of the continuum. Most questions require a response that is not black or white but instead some shade of gray. That does not mean, however, that students should attempt to respond in the middle of the continuum. Such an attempt usually results in a failure to articulate a clear position. Students should also beware of the fallacy of "positive response bias." Unfortunately, many students are inclined to answer a question in the affirmative. Students always need to carefully weigh all of the historical evidence and then craft a response that best articulates their understanding of the historical record. In other words, students should not feel free to argue any side simply because they can believe they can support it. Instead, they should feel compelled to support the side with the most evidence behind it.

Examples of thesis statements:

Bad: *George Washington set many important precedents as president.* This is a fact not a position.

Good: *The precedents that Washington set as America's first president greatly benefited the American political system.* This is a clear position that can be supported or opposed.

Weak: *The Revolutionary War brought about change in American society.* This is, technically, a position. But, it is vague and not really debatable.

Strong: *The Revolutionary War ushered in a slew of wide-ranging and permanent social changes in American society.* This is a clear, strong, and debatable thesis.

Sample Prompt:

Jacksonian Democrats viewed themselves as the guardians of the United States Constitution, political democracy, individual liberty, and equality of economic opportunity. In light of your knowledge of the following documents and your knowledge of the 1820's and 1830's, to what extent do you agree with the Jacksonians' view of themselves?

Types of Thesis Statements:

1. Direct: This is a straightforward statement that clearly and directly answers the question.

To a remarkable degree Jacksonian democrats succeeded in implementing their vision of American society.

2. Compound: Use this approach when trying to prove two main points. Use the word “and.”

Jacksonian democrats successfully portrayed themselves as guardians of American ideals and did indeed achieve a remarkable degree of success in protecting those ideals.

3. Split: This approach splits the thesis into several categories. In essence it combines the thesis statement with the plan of attack/themes of the essay. This works best when the prompt itself provides the essay categories.

To a large extent Jacksonian democrats were not effective guardians of the United States Constitution, political democracy, individual liberty, and equality of economic opportunity.

4. Complex-Direct: This type of thesis statement acknowledges that contrary evidence exists and addresses the complexity inherent in most essays prompts. A well executed complex thesis offers students the best opportunity to earn a high score. Key words such as “although” are helpful in constructing this type of thesis.

Although Jacksonian Democrats truly believed that they were the guardians of American ideals, their actions betrayed other priorities and rarely lived up to either their rhetoric or intentions.

5. Complex-Split: This approach splits the thesis into several categories, acknowledges that contrary evidence exists and tackles the complexity inherent in most APUSH essays.

Even though Jacksonian Democrats failed in their self-appointed roles as the guardians of the United States Constitution and individual liberty, they achieved great success in strengthening political democracy and the equality of economic opportunity.

OR

Despite a few notable lapses, in general, Jacksonian Democrats were good stewards of the United States Constitution, and oversaw an expansion of individual liberty, political democracy, and economic opportunity.