

# HOW TO TELL A STRONG THESIS STATEMENT FROM A WEAK ONE

## 1. A strong thesis takes some sort of stand.

*Weak:* There are some negative and positive aspects to manifest destiny.

*Strong:* Because manifest destiny promoted development and resulted in the development of the West, it was a positive part of American history.

*Weak:* There are some economic and some political causes of the French Revolution.

*Strong:* Although the lack of competent national leadership led to the French Revolution, the most significant causes were economic.

## 2. A strong thesis justifies discussion.

*Weak:* The Gilded Age was in the nineteenth century.

*Strong:* While the Gilded Age is viewed by many as a period of oppression of the working class and corruption in politics and business, development of economic potential and new technology helped build a strong nation in the late nineteenth century.

*Weak:* The Roman Empire did not last forever.

*Strong:* Due to military decay, the fall of Rome was inevitable.

## 3. A strong thesis expresses one main idea.

*Strong:* Native Americans were often exploited in the mid nineteenth century, and farmers as well as miners attempted to make money in the West.

*Strong:* Because greedy settlers exploited Native Americans, the traditional lifestyles and folkways of Native Americans were often destroyed.

*Strong:* The Byzantine Empire influenced the religious development of Russia, resulting in Russian alienation from Catholicism in the West.

## 4. A strong thesis statement is specific.

*Weak:* World War II had many causes and effects.

*Strong:* World War II was an important watershed for African American civil rights issues.

*Weak:* There are many similarities and differences between Louis XIV and Peter I.

## ANALYZE THIS

In an expository essay, you are asked to analyze or evaluate a question or statement. After you determine the thinking process addressed in the question, you must brainstorm and organize the content necessary to address the question. Some questions will ask “to what extent,” “compare and contrast,” “the relative importance,” “to indicate use and effect relationship,” etc.

You will find the following techniques will enable you to complete this task quickly as you brainstorm and organize:

Box outline

Five paragraph outline

Taking sides

Web design for PERSIA (Political, Economic, Religious, Social, Intellectual, and Artistic)

Describing a historical event (factors leading to, consequences of)

Webbing diagram

Steps to

## GOOD SOCIAL STUDIES WRITING

### I. Create an outline that builds your paper around central ideas.

An outline built around a THESIS and SUBTHESES will do the job much better than one that only lists categories of information or puts it into chronological order.

Facts and details always support the main ideas in evident ways.

### II. Avoid self-conscious discussion of your intended purpose and strategies.

Avoid self-conscious-sounding phrases such as “now let us turn to,” “I will demonstrate that,” “now we see that,” “I think that,” or (even worse) “I feel that.” Avoid first person.

### III. Give credit to other people's ideas.

Document EVERY quotation, paraphrase, or crucial idea that you borrow from a source.

### IV. Strive for clarity.

Learn first of all to write lean, tough, logical, precise prose. After you have learned that you may begin to experiment with metaphors, allusions, and fancily turned phrases. Use these only if they add to communication and do not clutter it.

Trying to impress your reader with obscure vocabulary, expertise in foreign or specialized verbiage and all pretension IS ABSOLUTELY OUT.

## **V. The paragraph is a specific unit.**

Avoid short paragraphs one after the other, or a paragraph that fails to develop a topical idea.

The paragraph should have a TIGHTLY FOCUSED idea, usually as a topic sentence.

## **VI: Write as if the reader is intelligent - but totally uninformed. Identify all persons and organizations to insure your paper is a self-sufficient unit.**

Do not refer to facts in language that implies that the reader is already familiar with them, unless you have first established the facts.

In the first reference to a person or organization give the complete name. Thereafter, unless a long space has elapsed, you may refer to a person only by the last name. In the case of an organization, after the first reference you may use an acronym (CIA for Central Intelligence Agency). Include the acronym in parenthesis with the first reference.

## **VII. Use quotations sparingly, only for color and clarity.**

Effective quotation is a literacy device—not a way to transfer information unprocessed and undigested from your sources to the reader.

Quoting does NOT add authority, unless you have already established that the source carries authority.

Do not quote whole sentences. Your language will flow better, without strange sentence structure and abrupt shifts in style, if you quote only short phrases and merge them nicely into your own stream of language.

## **VIII. Write consistently in past tense and in other ways that keep the reader firmly anchored in time.**

As you write, frequently intersperse time phrases “in 1907,” “two years later.” If the date is more important, state the date; if time elapsed is more important, use a phrase such as “two years later.”\*

\*not appropriate for economics, government, and world geography.

## **IX. Do not use passive voice.**

Passive voice destroys clarity because often it does not make clear who did the acting. (“The order was given”). In such cases, it fails to give complete information. Or even if it does give the information (“The order was given by Lincoln”) it gives it back-end-forward. It is better said: “Lincoln gave him the order.”

Taken from “Ten Commandments of Good Historical Writing” by Theron F. Schlabach.

## KEY WORDS IN WRITING PROMPTS

SIGNAL WORD	TASK
Analyze	Break the topic down into its parts; show causes and effects
Assess the validity	Weigh the truthfulness or accuracy of a statement
Compare	Show how two or more things are alike
Contrast	Show how two or more things are different
Defend	Support argument or position with facts, reasons, examples
Define	State the meaning of a term, describe the basic nature of something
Describe	Tell what something is like; illustrate what something is like
Develop	Create something (such as a plan); expand or enlarge something
Discuss	Examine or make observations about a subject; present a subject in detail.
Evaluate	Judge the significance, condition or value of a subject, event, or object
Examine	Observe carefully; study or analyze in detail.
Explain	Make an event, problem or relationship clear and understandable
Explore	Conduct a careful examination of a subject; investigate all possibilities
Identify	Describe something that fits the characteristics indicated in the prompt
Interpret	Explain the meaning or significance of a subject; offer an explanation
Justify	Show that a position is right or reasonable with facts, reasoning, and examples
Outline	Provide a general description covering the main points of a subject
Pros and cons	Arguments in favor of (pro) and opposed to (con) a position or action
Show	Demonstrate or explain by reasoning or step-by-step procedures
State	Show, explain or express in words
Summarize	Give a condensed description of an issue, event or sequence of events
Support	Provide evidence for; show how to be true with facts, reasons, and examples
Take a stand	State a position or an opinion you are prepared to support and uphold
Tell	Give a detailed account of an event, sequence of events, or situation
To what extent	Argue the degree to which something is true
Trace	Describe a train of events, follow the development or progress of a subject