Strategies for forming a thesis and three key ideas quickly

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Forming a thesis

Remember,

Thesis = Your opinion/argument in response to the question

But we must fully understand what the question is asking to form a good thesis, so we should read questions with the lens:

What does this question want from me?

When seeing a question for the first time, we should <u>annotate</u> it:

Q) "Iago as playwright uses language to imprison characters: Shakespeare, however, uses it to set them free" - Martin L. Wine (so the question has given me someone else's opinion about Shakespeare's use of language … maybe they will ask if I agree with it or not)

To what extent do you agree with Wine that Shakespeare set his characters free? (As expected! I will now think about whether I agree with Wine's opinion …), In your response, make detailed reference to the play. (So, the question wants me to back up my opinion with evidence from the play … nothing unfamiliar!)

Let Wine's argument = A, so what the question is really saying is

Here is argument A. To what extent do you agree with it? Back up your opinion with evidence from Othello.

Now all that is left is to write our thesis – in two steps:

1. Write <u>your opinion</u> in the simplest way possible first:

I completely disagree[1] with Wine's argument that Shakespeare uses language to set his characters free[2]. Because I think that Shakespeare uses language to shape an immoral Venetian society, and that society leads to either the physical or moral downfall of every character living in it[3], so the characters are in no way free.

[1] Because the question asked, "to what extent?" and for me, that extent is completely rather than partially or mostly etc.

[2] Giving the reader context as to what Wine's argument actually is.

[3] Can you guess what kinds of evidence I will be using to back up my opinion? The goal is not to state specific evidence in the thesis but instead give a clear picture as to the *kinds* of evidence that will be presented.

2. Write your opinion as a formal but concise *thesis* without personal pronouns or overly emotive language:

Wine's position that characters in *Othello* are "set … free" by Shakespeare's use of language is completely mistaken, as the playwright adopts language in *Othello* to paint an immoral Venetian society which predestines all characters to either moral downfall.

Forming three key ideas

If my thesis were,

John's opinion that Mary's cats should be fed conservatively to boost their wellbeing is completely mistaken, as the wellbeing of cats depends on their being fed excessively.

Then my three key ideas might be:

1. *Cats who eat a lot are happier, and happiness leads to wellbeing*
2. *Cats who are fed a lot have good health, which is essential to wellbeing*
3. *Cats who eat a lot make more friends, and amount of friends is proportional to wellbeing.* *it's not really, just an example!

But *why* are these *key ideas*? Because they fit the two following criteria:

1. They apply *generally*, that is, you could apply them to *any cat*.

   If I were to make key idea 1 *not* apply generally, it may read as:

   Mary's cat will be happier when it eats a lot.

   This is not general, because it only applies to Mary's cat, not all cats, so it is not a key idea. (A good way to check for general application is to check that there are no names of characters from *Othello* in your key ideas)

2. The conclusion that the reader draws from the key idea is our thesis

1. *Cats who eat a lot are happier, and happiness leads to wellbeing*
   Therefore, cats who eat a lot have wellbeing, which is our thesis
2. *Cats who are fed a lot have good health, which is essential to wellbeing*
   Therefore, cats who eat a lot have wellbeing, which is our thesis
3. *Cats who eat a lot make more friends, and amount of friends is proportional to wellbeing* (as above!)

Use the *therefore* test before settling on a key idea. Read the key idea, and ask, *therefore?* The plainest answer to that *therefore?* should be your thesis.

So, to recap, there are two criteria for key ideas

1. They apply generally
2. If you read the idea and then ask "*therefore?*", a reasonable answer is your thesis.

Let us construct three key ideas for our *Othello* thesis:

Wine's position that characters in *Othello* are "set ... free" by Shakespeare's use of language is completely mistaken, as the playwright adopts language in *Othello* to paint an immoral Venetian society which predestines all characters to moral downfall.

(these are most likely inaccurate to the play as I have not read it in full, just examples!)

1. Shakespeare uses his character's internal monologues to expose how (Key idea 1) one's freedom to maintain moral purity is inevitably and unwillingly stripped away by an immoral society.

    (i)   General application? Yes, we are saying "one's freedom to", this could be anyone, so it applies generally.

    (ii)   Therefore test: One's freedom to maintain purity is inevitably and unwillingly stripped away by an immoral society, and a lack of moral purity is immoral (you don't need to say this as it is reasonable to infer it) therefore, an immoral society predestines all characters to moral downfall, which is our thesis.

2. Shakespeare uses 15th century racial slurs and animalistic devices to portray how (Key idea 2) the inexorable discriminatory attitudes that arise from an immoral society destine discriminators to moral wickedness and leave the discriminated perpetually vengeful.

   (iii) General application? Yes, we are talking about "discriminators" and the "discriminated", this could be anyone, so it applies generally.

   (iv) Therefore test: the inexorable discriminatory attitudes that arise from an immoral society destine discriminators to moral wickedness and leave the discriminated perpetually vengeful, and moral wickedness and vengefulness are of course immoral, therefore, an immoral society predestines all characters to moral downfall, which is our thesis.

3. Through multiple instances of dramatic irony, Shakespeare suggests that (Key idea 3) an immoral society inevitably breeds deceivers driven by greed, who prompt the unreversible destruction of virtue within the deceived.

   (v) General application? Yes, we are talking about "deceivers" and the "deceived", this could be anyone, so it applies generally.

   (vi) Therefore test: an immoral society inevitably breeds deceivers driven by greed, who prompt the unreversible destruction of virtue within the deceived, and being driven by greed and having no virtue is immoral, therefore, an immoral society predestines all characters to moral downfall, which is our thesis.