

Example #1

Say I have an idea that I want to write about graphic matches in *Blood Simple* (just using this e.g. because it's familiar). That's my topic. It's a general area of interest, but I'm not saying anything about it. I can't argue it. They're there, but that's just a fact, not an arguable point. So... I think about it... I know has something to do with the way this complicated plot is all tied up in knots.... and I've got my examples in mind... the one where Abby faints, and the one with the fan, when it's a shot of Marty's fan, and the next shot is the fan at Ray's. But I need to make a claim... the point is that I'm stating something I believe to be true... i.e., my interpretation... which is that these matches help depict the fates of characters as completely intertwined. But to be able to write a reaction from that idea (or to write a longer essay, if that were the task), I need to turn it into a thesis, which is a sentence or sentences that control what I plan to actually say.

So my first draft of a thesis statement might be something like:

In *Blood Simple*, the Coen brothers depict morally bankrupt situations in which no one can trust anyone else, but in which everyone's fate rests on the actions of others; the use of graphic matches in two particular scenes help illustrate how this technique relates to that larger sense of the world.

Example #2

Because I thought it was really funny and striking, I might compare the set decor of the Arizona's home to Hi and Ed's home. I would need to figure out what I thought the Coens were up to in the way that their team made those spaces look. Since the point of the assignment is to really think about those little details, I would need to actually concentrate on this, but for the sake of this e-mail, maybe I decide that their choices are expressing a sense that a world that's normal and planned isn't always better than a world with a bit of chaos in it. (Why I like that idea as a thesis is that there are LOTS of different techniques and elements that I could use to make that argument. Since it's such a short assignment, I'm just going to be narrow and stick with decor.) Hi and Ed's trailer is full of crazy mismatched furniture, just like they're a mismatched couple, and they obviously don't have money, everything is kind of makeshift, and the baby is just part of the jumble, but the home is definitely full of love. The Arizona's nursery is totally organized, customized, clean, elaborate, etc.... I could think about lots of really specific details that I'd want to talk about (the welcome junior banner at Hi and Ed's vs. the names painted on the mega-crib). But Hi and Ed love that baby, would be great parents, are colorful, genuine, warm, passionate... to the point of absurdity! So my thesis adds my technique (set decor) to my thesis (normal isn't better than oddball) and narrow it by my choice of examples, and I get something like:

In *Raising Arizona*, the decor of two important sets expresses the Coens' comic message that being normal is no advantage over being an oddball.

See how little that thesis makes me responsible for talking about? And yet, if I'm being extremely detailed, I could write a five page paper on that topic with no problem! You can control a thesis that size and have the reaction be just 1.5 pages.