

WRITE A GREAT S.O.L. ESSAY!

Step 1: Focus on the Topic (*Thesis Statements*)

Where do I start?

Avoid the temptation to just start writing. Instead, make sure that you know what your essay should be about and come up with ideas that would explain your opinions.

What does my essay have to be about?

The test always gives an assigned topic for you to focus on in a written response. That topic will ask you to write a **persuasive** essay; in other words, your essay will need to convince the audience to act or think a certain way. Start by carefully reading the topic and underlining all important words that tell you what to do. Read the sample released topic below.

EXAMPLE: Some people believe that students should be required to take a music, a drama, or an art class. Should students be required to take a class in the arts, or should such classes be electives? Take a position on this issue. Use reasons and specific examples to support your position.

What are the important words in this topic? Underline the words that the essay should specifically discuss.

Did you underline the sentence that starts with “Should students be required”? If so, great! That sentence contains the main topic for your essay. For this topic, your essay should explain whether or not students should be required to take a class in the arts. To make sure that your essay stays on topic, write a **thesis statement** for your essay before writing anything else.

What is a thesis statement?

The thesis statement is the sentence that tells the main point of the entire essay. The thesis statement has to focus on the assigned topic, especially the part you underlined when you read the topic.

How do I write a thesis statement?

Take the sentence that has the main idea of the topic (the part you underlined), and put it into your own sentence. How can you take this sentence and make it focus on your topic? ***Should students be required to take a class in the arts, or should such classes be electives?***

One way to write a thesis sentence for this topic would be like this: ***Students should be required to take a class in the arts.*** See how my thesis statement uses words from the topic and tells what the main point of my essay will be? Your thesis statement should do the same.

How can I improve my thesis statements?

Just like any skill, writing essays gets easier with practice. Here is your chance! Read the topics on the back of this page. Underline the most important words in each writing prompt. Then use those underlined words to write a thesis statement for each topic.

EXAMPLE: *Many schools require students to participate in volunteer programs in their communities as a requirement for graduation. However, some people feel that requiring students to volunteer defeats the purpose of volunteering. Do you think students should be required to volunteer in their communities to receive their high school diplomas? Take a position on this issue. Support your response with reasons and specific examples.*

Answer: *I think students should be required to volunteer in their communities to receive their high school diplomas.*

1. *Some schools use cell phones in the classroom for educational purposes. Think about the effects of allowing students to have and use cell phones in classrooms. Take a position on this issue. Use reasons and specific examples to support your opinion.*
2. *Many students become involved in extracurricular activities to enrich their educational experiences, and some even become involved in so many activities that they have little time to study or complete homework assignments. Should schools control student involvement in extracurricular activities, or should the decision regarding extracurricular involvement be left to students and their families? Take a position on the issue. Support your response with reasons and examples.*
3. *Think about the benefits of working with a group or working alone. Which do you feel is more beneficial? Write to convince your teacher of your preference, either to work with a group or to work alone. Support your position with reasons and specific examples.*
4. *Most students enjoy summer vacation, but some educators feel that the summer break is too long and that students do not retain information as easily when they return in the fall. Some people argue that there should be year-round schools, where there would be a 3–4 week break in the summer, a longer winter break, and a week off in the spring and fall. Does this sound like a good idea to you? Why or why not? Take a position on the issue. Support your response with reasons and examples.*
5. *Many cities have issues with air pollution and traffic jams because there are too many cars on the roads. Some people feel that cities should restrict the use of cars and require people to walk, bike, or use public transportation, such as buses or trains. Do you think this proposal is a good idea? Why or why not? Take a position on the issue. Support your response with reasons and examples.*