

Preparing for the Writing Proficiency Exam

Writing a Thesis-Driven Essay

For the Writing Proficiency Exam, you will write a **persuasive essay** in which you take a **clear position on** one of the topics from the two prompt choices. Many of us learned at some point how to write a 5-paragraph essay, and that model, although limiting in some situations, will serve you well in tackling the Writing Proficiency Exam by prompting you to focus on the key elements of a **thesis-driven, persuasive essay: thesis, support, and conclusion**.

Thesis:

In your introductory paragraph, explain the general topic and assert your **Thesis Statement**.

- A thesis reflects your opinion on the topic: specific topic + your position = Thesis
- A thesis is the last sentence of your introduction

To test whether or not you have crafted a clear thesis, ask yourself:

- Do I mention the specific topic required by the prompt?
- Do I indicate my position on the topic?
- Would anyone disagree with my thesis statement?

If you can answer “yes” to all three questions, you have a thesis.

Consider the following prompt:

“We are increasingly connected to each other but oddly more alone.”

Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*.

Has digital technology, especially cell phones and social media, made people more connected or more detached from one another?

Good thesis statements:

Example 1: *While cell phones and social media were designed to keep friends and family connected, they actually promote isolation and division in society.*

Example 2: *With the invention of cell phones and social media, people are more connected now than they have ever been.*

These two examples clearly focus on the topic (cell phones and social media) and assert a position.

This is not a thesis statement:

Example 3: *Many people own cell phones and use social media accounts.*

Although this thesis reflects the topic, it does not assert a position.

Support:

To support your thesis statement, you must provide at least two body paragraphs.

- Each body paragraph addresses one reason in support of your thesis
- Each body paragraph begins with a **topic sentence**, which introduces the reason for the paragraph
- Each body paragraph provides details and/or examples to support the topic sentence
- Each body paragraph refers to the thesis

Let's return to Thesis Statement Example 1: *While cell phones and social media were designed to keep friends and family connected, they actually promote isolation and division in society.*

Here's an example of a **good body paragraph** in support of this thesis statement:

- **Topic Sentence:** *First, digital technology allows people to escape the world around them.*
- **Details and/or Examples:**
 - *People often play CandyCrush, scroll through Facebook, or answer texts while in social settings.*
 - *Rather than engage in conversation in public spaces like waiting rooms or subways, people are absorbed in their handheld devices.*
 - *Even at family get-togethers it is not uncommon to see family members looking at their screens rather than engaging with the relatives around them.*
- **Back to Thesis:** *Since people take their handheld devices with them everywhere as a means of distraction, they are constantly isolating themselves from their surroundings.*

Conclusion:

To conclude your argument, do not introduce new ideas. Instead, you should do the following:

- A conclusion summarizes your main reasons for your position
- A conclusion answers the question, "so what?," by explaining why the topic is important.

Here's a sample **conclusion** to an essay driven by Thesis Statement Example 1:

Even though digital technology has the potential to connect people around the world, it actually isolates people from their immediate surroundings, creates feelings of neglect among families and friends, and promotes division between both loved ones and strangers. People must recognize that hand held technology is changing the way we interact with others and altering our personal relationships and commit to limiting their screen time in favor of meaningful communication with others.

This conclusion assumes that the 2nd and 3rd reasons (*creates feelings of neglect and promotes division*) are each developed as body paragraphs.