

Thesis statements for literary papers:

Keep the following list in mind when devising your thesis:

1. **Thesis statement is never a question.**
2. **Thesis statement establishes your stance (position) on a particular issue; it is not a fact or an observation.**
3. **Thesis statement must tell the reader why your position is significant.**
4. **Thesis statement answers the question “HOW?” or “WHY?”**
5. **Thesis statement concerns an issue that society at large would care about.**
6. **Thesis statement has to be connected to the primary text; that is, the reader must clearly know that your thesis is an argument built out of the primary text.**
7. **Thesis statement must effectively stand up to the litmus test of a “SO WHAT?” or “WHO CARES?”**

Let's look at the following thesis statements on Emily Dickinson's poem “Tell the Truth but Tell It Slant” and evaluate their strengths according to the list above:

1. Emily Dickinson's poem “Tel the Truth but Tell It Slant” focuses on a voice that is expressing the thoughts of a man from the beginning, middle, and ending.

#2: this is not an argument, but an observation. This thesis fails to take a stance. Further, it fails to answer the question why or how the reader and society at large should care.

2. Is Emily Dickinson's short poem enough of a literary work to be thoroughly analyzed?

#1: A thesis is never a question. It is always a statement that answers why or how and tells the reader why he/she should care. Even if this question was stated as a statement “Emily Dickinson's short poem is not enough of a literary work to be thoroughly analyzed” it fails to tell the reader why this position is significant. It would not stand up to the question, “Who cares?” So it is not enough to analyze, so, big deal.

3. In Emily Dickinson's “Tell the Truth but Tell It Slant,” she mentions that the truth should be told a particular way because it must be something that can be brutal so it will hide the pain of truth.

#2: This thesis does not establish the writer's stance; it is merely observing what the poem is stating. Does the writer agree with this? Does the writer believe that truths can indeed be painful and therefore must not always be told? Is this unethical?

4. When people lie, other people get hurt. But in order to be successful in this world, sometimes people have to lie.

#6: The thesis must be connected to the primary text. The reader needs to know that the writer's argument is developed out of the primary text. Also, this thesis can be narrowed somewhat. It begs the question, "So should one put one's personal interest in front of another individual's well-being?" "Is this unethical?" The writer needs to fully understand the complexity of his/her argument. Right now, he/she does not fully capture this.

5. Truth can be hard to take and comprehend. Considering "slanting" without dismissing the totality is the preferred method to reveal the truth. By doing this, the receptor will better understand and hopefully accept the truth more readily

#6: see above comment.

6. Poet Emily Dickinson's "Tell All the Truth, but Tell It Slant" underscores the need to cushion the brutality of truth from the receiver. Many individuals want to live a morally conscious life by being honest and truthful. Yet, these ideal and wholesome qualities can also create harm. That is why withholding certain truths may be more morally conscious than actually telling them.

This thesis statement upholds all seven in the list above to ensure a strong, viable thesis.