

What makes an effective Thesis/Essential Question?

From topic to tentative Thesis/Essential Question:

A template

1. Stating the topic

Example topic: School uniforms

My topic is _____

2. Narrowing the topic

If you can, narrow your topic at this time. If you can't, that's okay. Feel free to list more than one variation of your topic.

Examples of narrowed topics:

School uniforms in public schools.

School uniforms in suburban public schools.

School uniforms in CPHS.

My narrowed topic(s) is (are) _____

3. Brainstorming the topic

Brainstorm all of the possible aspects or **questions** you can think of about your topic.

(Get a friend/peer/teacher/relative to help you---let your mind freely explore anything related to the topic. Be careful not to let your initial bias toward the topic get in the way of brainstorming.)

Example of brainstorming:

School uniforms in CPHS

- Why? Why not?
- How?
- Where? Under what circumstances?
- Factors to consider?
- Where has it worked? Where hasn't it worked and why?
- What are the factors involved at CPHS?
- What kind?
- Surveys: schools that have them, schools that don't, schools that have had them and dropped the idea, student opinion at CPHS, teacher/administration opinion

- Experts: studies, theories

4. Taking a stance/position about the narrowed topic

Take a stance or position. Are you **for or against** the topic/concept/practice?

Examples:

- I am for school uniforms at CPHS.
- I am against school uniforms at CPHS.
- I don't know right now how I feel, but I am leaning toward...
- I have no idea.

At this point, without the benefit of research, tap into your prior knowledge and brainstorm your reasons for being for or against the topic/ concept.

Or, brainstorm all the possible reasons (Use a t-chart) for and against (Keep this chart handy as you do your research because you can add reasons that you might not have thought about originally.)

Brainstorm reasons for and against:

For	Against

My position on my topic is:

As you move through this process, be sure to KEEP AN OPEN MIND TO NEW INFORMATION, PERSPECTIVES, AND RELATED ASPECTS OF THE TOPIC.

5. Forming a question

Now, decide on a question to guide your research.

Example: Would mandating school uniforms for all students at Clover Park High School have beneficial effects for academics and the social environment?

6. Developing a tentative Thesis/Essential Question

Thesis/Essential Question should pass the 5 tests:

1. Frame question so it makes the reader ask, “How” or “Why?”
2. Avoid questions that no one will react to or that a reasonable reader will react to with a sarcastic “No kidding!” or “Who cares?” Any question that is *closed* or has one or more “right” answer should be avoided.
3. Avoid general words or phrases; avoid words that are too extreme or that lead the reader to a specific answer.
4. Lead the reader towards your subtopics by choosing your words and phrases carefully.
5. Make sure that the development of the thesis is doable within the limits of the assignment.

Examples:

- Are school uniforms mandated clothing? (Fails tests #2, So? No kidding!)
- Why are school uniforms a bad idea? (Fails test #3—‘bad’ idea)
- Will mandating school uniforms for students at Springfield High School result in increased academic performance? (Passes all tests)
- Even if mandating school uniforms at SHS does not result in higher academic performance, do other benefits make it a good idea? (Passes all tests)
- Will school uniforms at Clover Park High School will kill creativity and individuality? (Fails test #3 "will kill creativity and individuality of whom")

My tentative Thesis/Essential Question is:

Now, you are ready to research to find support for your tentative thesis/answer your Essential Question. Remember, you can always modify your Thesis/Essential Question according to what you find during your research, and you can even modify it during the process of drafting and revising your paper. However, your tentative Thesis/Essential Question should now guide your research.