

Activity 22: Considering Structure—Evaluating Thesis Statements

Using the guidelines for developing effective thesis statements, evaluate Thompson’s thesis statement. Then evaluate the thesis statements taken from student essays below. Label them “very effective,” “OK,” or “not effective,” and briefly explain each of your decisions.

Guidelines for Developing Thesis Statements

- A thesis reflects the writer’s position on a question that has more than one side. After reading the thesis, the reader should be able to explain what the issue is and what side of the argument the writer is on.
- Develop a thesis statement that makes the topic and your opinion or position on the topic clear to your reader
- Choose one side of the issue if your topic requires it, but you may qualify your position.
- If the topic asks “to what extent” you agree or disagree with a statement, be sure to explain how strongly you agree or disagree. You may include a “because” statement, but you do not need to list all the reasons for your position.
- Neither a factual statement nor a question make an effective thesis because they do not reflect the writer’s position on the issue.

Thompson’s Thesis

“In terms of cognitive development, as research on the human brain has shown, Brazill—and any other young teen—is far from adulthood.” (How effective is this thesis statement?)

Samples: Evaluate Student Thesis Statements

1. Juvenile offenders are young people under the age of 18 who commit crimes.
2. Sentencing juveniles to mandatory life in prison is necessary because it keeps them from committing more crimes. Also, it’s what the families of victims want, and it holds the teen murderers accountable for what they did.
3. Juveniles must be held accountable for their crimes, but they must be treated differently than adults.
4. Sentencing juveniles to life in prison is both good and bad.
5. Children’s crimes should not be brushed off, but it is not right to throw children who don’t even understand the enormity of the crime that they have committed into the slammer for life.
6. With a growing number of young adults being tried and sentenced as adults for violent crimes, the question arises, “Why did they commit these crimes?”

Now copy the thesis from the first draft of your essay. How would you judge its effectiveness based on the criteria above. If you do not think it is a very effective thesis, revise it so it is improved.