Thesis Machine

How to write a complex thesis

Adapted from Brittany Berriz

Step 1: Identify Targeted Skill

Identify which of the historical reasoning skills the prompt is asking you to address: Comparison, Causation, Continuity and Change over Time.

Sample Prompt: Analyze the extent to which the New England and Chesapeake colonies differed.

Sample Prompt: Analyze the extent to which the federal government was able to increase racial equality during the Reconstruction Era from 1865 - 1877.

Sample Prompt: Analyze the extent to which the French and Indian war led to the American Revolution.

Step 2: Identify the Debatable Issue

With history, you want to "live in the grey." In other words, you want to recognize that historians identify and weigh the relative significance of multiple causes, contexts, comparisons, and changes.

In order to take a specific and defensible stance on the prompt, you will need to identify what issues historians might debate about the question at hand before you can determine where you stand on the issue.

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Step 3: Identify Your Position

Use our **Evidence/Idea Protocol** to brainstorm what you know about the topic (your evidence) and to formulate an argument around your evidence (ideas).

Do not skip this step!!! The best arguments will be grounded in evidence. If you brainstorm first, you will be working from a position of strength as your essay will be crafted around the evidence you have identified rather than trying to make evidence fit a predetermined argument.

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Step 4: State Your Position

Once you have identified the debatable issue and brainstormed what you know about the prompt, it is time to take a stance on the issue in the form of a declarative statement.

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Step 5: Provide Rationale for your Stance

Review your evidence/idea list and identify the the primary reason(s) for taking the stance you took. Once you have identified which reasons are the most persuasive and provide you with the best evidentiary support for your argument, add your rationale to your position using "because"

___position___ + ___rationale 1__ & __rationale 2__

Sample Prompt: Analyze the extent to which the federal government was able to increase racial equality during the Reconstruction Era from 1865 - 1877.

The Federal Government made great strides in increasing racial equality

The passage of the 13th Amendment

The passage of the 15th Amendment

Step 6 : Qualify your Position

Qualify your thesis by addressing both similarities and differences. If your position is that the differences are more significant, you will address the similarities in your qualification. This is where you "live in the grey" by acknowledging that there are both similarities and differences, long and short term causes/effects, and both changes and continuities over time.

Add this to your rough thesis using "Although," "While" or "However

Qualification + Position + Rationale or Qualification + Rationale + Position

Example:

While southern democrats passed black codes to restrict the rights of African Americans, the federal government drastically increased racial equality during the Reconstruction Era through the passage of the the 13th and 15th Amendments.
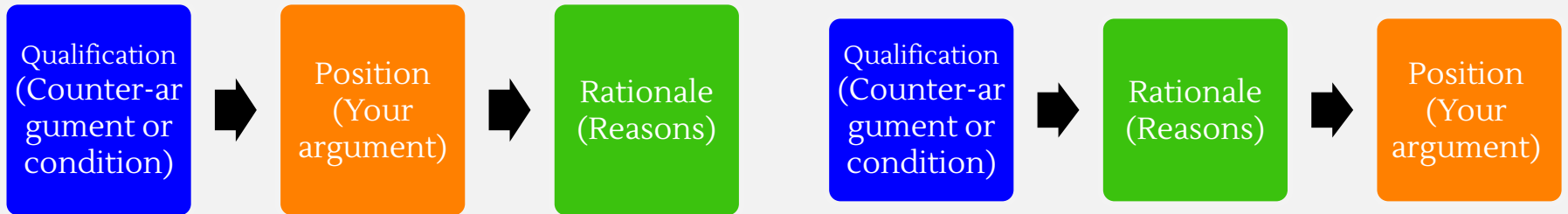
Southern states passed black codes to restrict the economic rights of African Americans. However, the passage of the 13th and 15th Amendments prove that the federal government made great strides in advancing racial equality during the Reconstruction Era.

Step 7: Polish your Thesis

- **Refine your thesis by taking out excessive words**
  - You don't want your thesis to be too long, so try to condense your arguments, counter arguments, and rationale to the most important points.

- **If possible, refine your thesis by removing "because"**
  - Instead of stating your position verbatim and using "because" to connect them, combine your position and rationale so that the significance is implied.

Thesis Machine Overview

1. Identify the Historical Thinking Skill (Causation, Comparison, Context, Change and Continuity)

2. Identify the Debatable Issue – What can be debated about the prompt?

3. Identify your Position – Brainstorm to determine where you stand on the issue

4. State your Position – Take a clear and defensible position on the prompt

5. Provide Rationale – Provide the most compelling reasons for the position that you took

6. Qualify Position – Consider the various complexities of causation, context, historical change, and comparison

7. Polish -- Take out pronouns or excessive words.

Qualification (Counter-argument or condition)	→	Position (Your argument)	→	Rationale (Reasons)		Qualification (Counter-argument or condition)	→	Rationale (Reasons)	→	Position (Your argument)

Although (counterpoint or condition), Your position or claim, two main points that support your claim.

(counterpoint or condition), however, establish two main points and state your claim.