

# Crafting a Thematic Statement

A **theme** of a written work is an *overall idea about life or the world* expressed by that work.

- The term *theme* is used more often when talking about fiction, but it is similar to the concept of an *argument* in persuasive writing. You may think of theme as the *argument of a literary text* (e.g., a story, poem, novel)—in other words, what the text wants to convince you of about life, people, or the world.

A **thematic statement** summarizes a/the theme of a work. It is similar to a *thesis statement*. Most short works, such as short stories and poems, express one or two themes; longer works, such as novels and plays, usually express several. However, an author almost never states the theme of his or her work directly. Readers discover the themes of texts and write thematic statements to summarize them.

When crafting a thematic statement, follow these guidelines:

1. A good thematic statement typically avoids superlatives such as *all*, *every*, and *completely* because life is rarely absolute. Instead, it uses more moderate language, such as *often*, *some*, *sometimes*, or *most*.
  - a. Ex: “A person with a dark, troubled past will **never** be able to overcome it and achieve lasting happiness.” TOO ABSOLUTE
  - b. Ex: “People with dark, troubled pasts are **often unable** to overcome them and achieve lasting happiness.” MODERATE
2. A good thematic statement is a complete sentence rather than a single word or phrase.
  - a. Ex: “Love” (not a theme but rather a topic; what the text says about love is the theme)
  - b. Ex: “People may love the *idea* of someone more than the true person.”  
THEMATIC STATEMENT
3. A good thematic statement does not take the form of an instruction, nor is it preachy—it avoids words such as *ought* and *should*.
  - a. Ex: “Don’t become too obsessed with any single thing because it will ruin your life.” INSTRUCTION
  - b. Ex: “People should not obsess over a single thing because the obsession may destroy them.” PREACHY
  - c. Ex: “Obsession over a single thing may destroy a person.” GOOD THEMATIC STATEMENT

Examples of Thematic Statements:

When a person values self-respect first, ultimately she may be able to enjoy lifelong happiness and love with another person. (*Jane Eyre*)

If people strive to overcome prejudice and see others as they are, they may learn to appreciate each other and coexist peacefully. (*To Kill a Mockingbird*)

In taking revenge against cruelty, a person sometimes ends up practicing the same cruelty she was trying to punish. (*Mean Girls*)