

The Thesis Machine: An Approach to Crafting a Thesis

Step 1: Topic/Issue

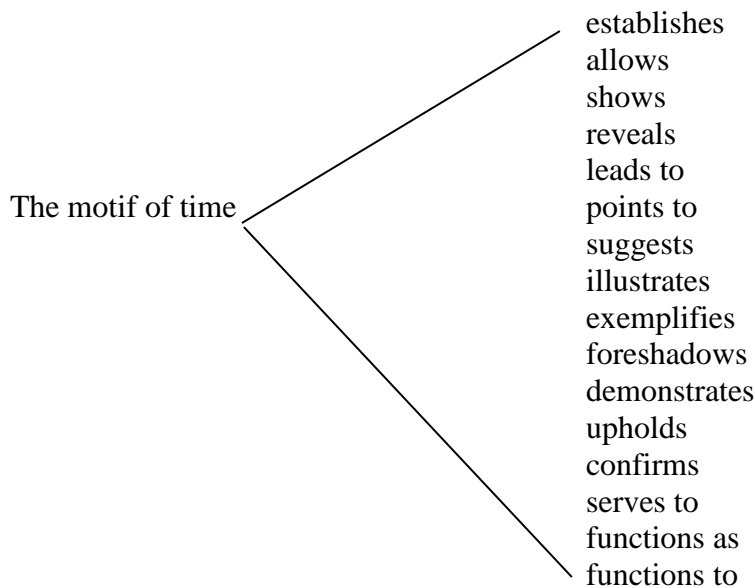
Identify the topic under consideration for analysis:

The motif of

Color	functions as _____ .
Time	
Light	
Decay	
Sports	
Parties	
Weather	
Eyes/Sight	
The Automobile	
Illusion vs. Reality	
Animals and Insects	

Step 2: Topic/Issue + Verb

Begin with the topic/issue and choose a verb that accurately shows how the topic/issue functions in the text. Do not use form of the verb “to be”: am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been. Note: make sure you look up the words in the list below as these words/phrases are not interchangeable.



- The motif of time [in *The Great Gatsby*] reveals . . .
- The motif of sports [in *The Great Gatsby*] suggests . . .
- The motif of “eyes” in [*The Great Gatsby*] illustrates . . .

Step 3: Topic/Issue + Verb + Claim

After you have an accurate active verb that points to the function of your topic/issue, you now have to answer the question “what” after the Topic/Issue and the Verb.

- a. The use of time [in *The Great Gatsby*] reveals what?
 - b. Moral corruption [in *The Great Gatsby*] leads to what?
 - c. The motif of “eyes” [in *The Great Gatsby*] illustrates what?
-
- a. The use of time reveals the characters’ inability to live in the present.
 - b. Moral corruption leads to death and destruction
 - c. The motif of “eyes” illustrates the contrast between reality and illusion.

Step 4: Qualify, Shape, and Impact Your Argument

In step four you want to use one or more of the following questions after your claim to help qualify, shape, and impact your argument: So what? Whom does this affect? What are the long-term and short-term consequences? Why do we care?

Also, take this time to *rigorously reevaluate* the language in your thesis. Don’t be afraid to cross out words, phrases, and even start from scratch.

- a. ~~The use of time motif reveals the characters’~~², Gatsby’s ~~inability~~ need to ~~live in the present~~ reinvent himself, an impulse that blinds him to the illusions of the present and the dangers of the future.
- b. ~~Moral corruption leads to death and destruction.~~ When Tom and Daisy use people as a means to an end, they demonstrate a moral corruption that leads to death.
- c. The motif of “eyes” ~~illustrates the contrast between reality and illusion~~ reveals a judgment on this world of moral decay, exposing the ugly truth that confuses illusion for reality and fantasy for dream.

Step 5: Reverse and Test

Test your faith in the thesis and expose potential counter-arguments by reversing your position.

When Tom and Daisy use people as a means to an end, they demonstrate a moral corruption that leads to death.

Counter-argument: By acting as though all people deserve dignity, Tom and Daisy demonstrate the strong moral center in the novel.

[Note: If you find that this statement is impossible to argue in the context of the novel, then your thesis—the opposite of this—may be too one-sided and not arguable. If you find that you can support the counterargument, then acknowledge the opposition in your paper and thoughtfully refute it.]