

THE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH AND THESIS STATEMENT

Sample Question: To what extent did the Civil War constitute a revolution in American society?

STRUCTURING AN INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH:

1. Establish the setting of the essay. Briefly introduce the reader to the subject.
 - (Example: "The Civil War, occurring between the years 1861 and 1865, was the most devastating conflict in American history.")
2. Provide an insightful comment that establishes your basis for analysis.
 - Example: "In determining whether the Civil War was a revolution in American society, one must assess the extent to which society was changed by the war."
3. Provide a **partition** that establishes three major sub-topics you plan to discuss.
 - Example: "Politically, the war established the supremacy of the Republican party in national politics for much of the next fifty years. Socially, the war saw significant gains in African American rights. And constitutionally, the war established the supremacy of the federal government over the states."
4. Finish paragraph with a **clear thesis statement** that establishes the purpose of the essay.
 - Example: "Thus, the Civil War did, in fact, represent a political, social and constitutional revolution in America."

THESIS TYPES:

1. **Simple thesis:** "The Civil War was a revolution in American society." (Rating: poor)
 - Thesis is far too simplistic. It contains no partition or analysis.
2. **Complex-simple thesis:** "In some respects, Americans experienced profound changes during the war. After the war, it was clear that society had also been changed dramatically in a number of important areas." (Rating: fair)
 - The analytical aspect of the thesis is promising. However, *no partition is established*. The thesis does not establish *how* American society was changed by the war.
3. **Simple-split thesis:** "The Civil War was a revolution in America politically, socially, and constitutionally." (Rating: fair)
 - Thesis provides a **partition**: politics, society, and the Constitution.
 - Thesis lacks an explanation or general analysis in each of the three areas in the partition.
 - Note: This thesis would be a "simple thesis" if the question already contained a partition.
4. **Complex-split thesis:** "Politically, the war established the supremacy of the Republican party in national politics for much of the next fifty years. Socially, the war saw significant gains in African American rights. And constitutionally, the war established the supremacy of the federal government over the states. Thus, the Civil War did in fact represent a political, social and constitutional revolution in America." (Rating: superior)

THE "GRAY AREA" THESIS

Many AP questions allow the student to formulate a thesis with more nuances. Here is a more sophisticated complex-split thesis to the above question:

"Although the Civil War resulted in the supremacy of the Republican party for the next fifty years and led to a constitutional revolution regarding African American rights, blacks in the South were virtually abandoned by the North in 1877 and subsequently dominated by the white-supremacist Democratic party of the "Solid South. Thus, to a larger extent, the Civil War did represent a revolution constitutionally and in national politics but it was not a complete revolution regarding social and political issues in the South."

Notice that the above thesis argues "to a larger extent." When answering a question, the writer must take a position. It is not enough to state "to some extent" or "to another extent." A thesis should take a position one way or another. Phrases such as "to a larger extent," "to a lesser extent," "more important," "less important," etc., reveal that the writer has taken a definite position on a question.

Moreover, the word "**although**" is used effectively to begin the thesis.

It is important not to try to write a thesis that is all "black" or all "white." The most effective essays attempt to navigate the "gray area" in a more sophisticated fashion. The highest scores on AP exams tend to be in the "gray area."

Compare and contrast the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Egypt and Mesopotamia were among the first river valley civilizations. However, due to their geographic differences they differed politically, religiously, and socially. Mesopotamia constantly changed hands, both had different world views, and warriors were not alike in their social standing.

Praise: has a partition and some detail about each partition

Suggestion: I would just change the wording of the 2nd sentence to something like “These differences in geography led to greater political instability in Mesopotamia, vastly different world views in the two societies, and differences in the social status of warriors.”

Although Egypt and Mesopotamia developed independently, geography impacted the trade of these civilizations similarly. Yet, to a larger extent the geography of the two regions influenced unique governmental and religious practices.

Praise: has 3 distinct subtopics (partitions) but also is a strong argument showing that trade was impacted, but government and religious practices were impacted more

Suggestion: just needs a little detail about trade, government and religious practices

Although the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia had many similar characteristics due to their individual geographies, each civilization varied in religion, social structure, and political organization.

Praise: has a partition

Suggestion: Should take out “similar characteristics” and insert an example of how they were similar. Has a partition, but does not give any detail about the 3 subtopics

Although Egypt and Mesopotamia both developed in river valleys, differences in their diplomatic, religious, and political policies developed because of other differences in geography.

Praise: states similarities and differences without saying “There were similarities and differences.” Very clear and concise. Has a partition.

Suggestion: Give a little detail about the subtopics.

Although Egypt and Mesopotamia’s respective rivers allowed the existence of each society, their effect on the religion, social structure, and economies led to radically different civilizations.

Praise: states similarities and differences without saying “There were similarities and differences.” Very clear and concise. Has a partition.

Suggestion: Give a little detail about the subtopics.

Although the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia both developed in river valleys, they differed in geographical features, their respective polytheistic views, and the overall development of their social structures.

Praise: states similarities and differences without saying “There were similarities and differences.” Very clear and concise. Has a partition.

Suggestion: Give a little detail about the subtopics.

Although the two civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt were established in river valleys, Egypt was more prosperous because of natural barriers that provided protection from invaders and the annual flooding of the Nile River gave them a stable sense of agriculture, where as Mesopotamia was subject to invasions and had unpredictable flooding which caused numerous challenges throughout its times.

Praise: states similarities and differences without saying “There were similarities and differences.”

Suggestion: Briefly mention the challenges Mesopotamia faced. Use SRRITE to put these details into clear categories.