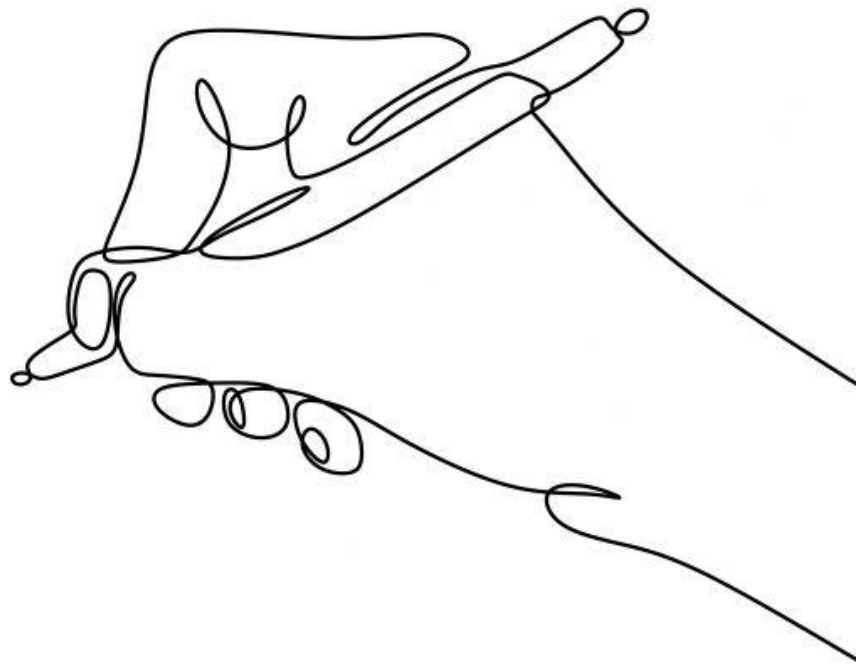


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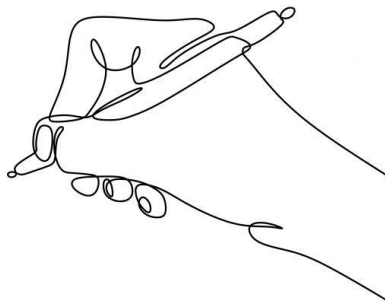
HOW TO WRITE A THESIS STATEMENT



Compiler:
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WRITING A THESIS STATEMENT

What is a thesis statement?

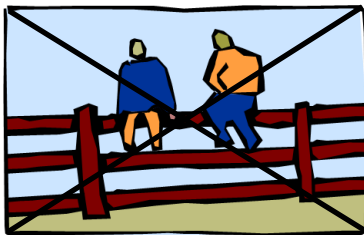
A thesis statement is a position you will argue in your essay/thesis/dissertation. This central statement helps frame the rest of your writing.

Why do you write a thesis statement?

A thesis statement requires you to take a position. This means you do not 'sit on the fence'. You must be clear in your argument.

A good thesis statement:

- is debatable, meaning it must be possible to present a case for and against the statement made (but you argue for one side),
- limits the scope of your essay, and
- can be supported by academic literature.



Example

In Australia, everyone who finishes year 12 should go to university. — position

There are advantages and disadvantages to going to university. — 'fence sitting' i.e. not stating a position.

Where is the thesis statement placed?

Your thesis statement is placed in the introduction, after an opening sentence, identifying a problem and giving a brief background.

Following the thesis statement you outline what is to come in the essay. By having the outline after the thesis statement, you can use it to support your claim. However, some disciplines prefer the thesis statement to be at the end of the introduction. You should always check with your tutor.

Example

Thesis statement:

With growing demands to meet student needs, face-to-face lectures will be non-existent in Australian universities by 2030.

Outline / support for claim:

This inevitable demand for lectures to be uploaded online is due to increased cost of campus parking, a growing number of online students, more international students wanting to be able to replay content, students with special needs requiring easier access or captions, and students in general wanting flexible viewing time.

A **thesis statement** can be a little longer to include some of the content of the argument to explain why that is your position. However, it should be quite succinct.

The **outline** you write in the introduction should reflect the structure of your essay paragraphs. Each paragraph should make a new point that builds on your main argument in your thesis statement.

How do you write a thesis statement?

- 1) Begin by highlighting the keywords in the essay question and brainstorming ideas and views.
- 2) Ask yourself — “what is the main point I want to make?”
- 3) Write your position in plain English.
- 4) Keep rewriting it until it has a strong academic tone and clear perspective.
- 5) Ask yourself — “is the evidence I have provided strong enough to convince the reader of my point?”

It is good to start with a provisional thesis statement and then refine it once you have written more of your essay and built your argument. However, you should always have a clear position before you begin writing.

Your thesis statement will evolve as you:

- read more sources and gain new insights,
- gather more evidence,
- analyse and brainstorm ideas,
- critique and write, and
- edit and proofread.

TIP

You need to rephrase your thesis statement to include it in your conclusion. This helps to reinforce your central argument. Using synonyms and restructuring a sentence can help with this.

TIP

Use keywords from the essay question in your thesis statement to ensure you are answering the question directly.

What is a counter argument?

A counter argument is the opposing view of the position you have taken in your essay. In your essay, you will be expected to argue for one position. However, it is also important to mention any counter arguments and then refute them immediately in the following sentence.

This does not go in the thesis statement. It could be in your next paragraph, mentioned briefly in each paragraph as you make new points or as a paragraph before the conclusion when you discuss the future of your topic. You should plan this in your essay structure before writing.

TIP

Not all academic essays will be argumentative essays. Some may require you to describe something. In descriptive essays you may not be required to state your position. Always read your assessment outlines carefully and check with your tutor if you are unsure.

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How to Create a Strong Thesis Statement

Many writing assignments ask you to create a thesis-driven argument. Your thesis statement should explicitly lay out the specific argument you will support in the body of your paper.

1. A strong thesis statement takes some sort of stand.

Remember that your thesis needs to show your conclusions about a subject. For example, if you are writing a paper for a class on fitness, you might be asked to choose a popular weight-loss product to evaluate. Here are two thesis statements:

There are some negative and positive aspects to the Banana Herb Tea Supplement.

This is a weak thesis statement. First, it fails to take a stand. Second, the phrase *negative and positive aspects* is vague.

Because Banana Herb Tea Supplement promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, it poses a potential danger to customers.

This is a stronger thesis because it takes a stand, and because it's specific.

2. A strong thesis statement justifies discussion.

Your thesis should indicate the point of the discussion. If your assignment is to write a paper on kinship systems, using your own family as an example, you might come up with either of these two thesis statements:

My family is an extended family.

This is a weak thesis because it merely states an observation. Your reader won't be able to tell the point of the statement, and will probably stop reading.

While most American families would view consanguineal marriage, or marriage between people from a common ancestor, as a threat to the nuclear family structure, many Iranian families, like my own, believe that these marriages help reinforce kinship ties in an extended family.

This is a stronger thesis because it shows how your experience contradicts a widely-accepted view. A good strategy for creating a strong thesis is to show that the topic is controversial. Readers will be interested in reading the rest of the essay to see how you support your point.

3. A strong thesis statement is specific.

A thesis statement should show exactly what your paper will be about, and will help you keep your paper to a manageable topic. For example, if you're writing a seven-to-ten page paper on hunger, you might say:

World hunger has many causes and effects.

This is a weak thesis statement for two major reasons. First, *world hunger* can't be discussed thoroughly in seven to ten pages. Second, *many causes and effects* is vague. You should be able to identify specific causes and effects. A revised thesis might look like this:

Hunger persists in Glandelinia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.

This is a stronger thesis statement because it narrows the subject to a more specific and manageable topic, and it also identifies the specific causes for the existence of hunger.

4. A strong thesis answers a HOW or WHY question about your topic through specific language.

Here is a broad formula to think of the components of a weak thesis statement compared to a stronger thesis statement.

Broad Noun	+	Weak Verb	+	Vague, Evaluative Adjective
The economic situation		is		bad.
Specific Noun	+	Action Verb	+	Assertive Predicate
The tax policies of the current administration		threaten to reduce the tax burden on the middle class		by sacrificing education and health-care programs for everyone.

Thesis Statements: Overview

A thesis statement is a sentence (or two) that presents the main argument of a paper; the thesis typically appears near the beginning of a paper, often at the end of the introduction. A thesis presents a clear idea of the paper to provide the reader a preview of the main findings of the paper.

A thesis statement makes an argument that is debatable. It sets up the reader's expectations. A thesis, therefore, is as helpful as the picture on a jigsaw puzzle box. Without it, readers may become frustrated trying to determine the connection between arguments or come to the wrong conclusion.

Myths

- **A thesis statement must come at the end of the first paragraph of a paper:**
A thesis statement works in conjunction with the introduction. It is not required to be the last sentence if it impedes the logic of the paragraph (EXCEPT if your instructor has explicitly asked for this placement)
- **A thesis statement can only be one sentence, regardless of clarity:**
In the advanced thesis handout, this is covered in more detail. Thesis statements should be clear and easy to read. You can use a series of (typically two) sentences to express the main claim and reasoning of the paper.
- **A thesis statement must be perfect before a paper can be written:**
Having a clear thesis statement at the beginning can help to focus your paper; your argument, however, may change as you engage with your material. Make sure your thesis statement matches the paper you write.
- **A thesis statement must incorporate your three supporting arguments:**
Your thesis statement should give a sense of how you are arguing your paper, but it does not have to be a list. You can have more than three supporting arguments in your paper. You may choose to explain the relationship between your key points and thesis in a series of sentences.
- **Every faculty, department, or course requires the same thesis statement style:**
Depending of what course you're taking, who your professor is, or what your topic is, your thesis statement requirements may change. Some professors require your thesis statement to be a single sentence. Others require you to list your supporting arguments within. Whatever the case, make sure you follow your course outline and listen to your professor's instructions.

'Working' Thesis Statements

A working thesis statement can be helpful for your research and writing process. Writers who develop a tentative thesis early in the research process are less likely to get bogged down in the research process and more likely to be critical readers. A working thesis aids in the judgment of material, content, and importance.

Starting points to thesis development:

When unsure where to start, thesis templates can help you develop a working thesis:

- Formula statements¹
 - The key to formula statements is to state the relationship between the topic, situation/reasoning, and position. As you progress, you should return to the formula and adapt it to mirror your progress.
 - (Topic) + (position) = (reasoning for position)
 - (Specific Topic) + (active verb) + (conditions/context) = position
- Research questions
 - You can also use a series of questions to help refine your topic and argument, particularly when you are unsure of your conclusions.
 - *Craft of Research* (2008)² suggests the following process for developing goals:
 - Topic: I am studying ...
 - Question: because I want to find out what/ why/ how...
 - Significance: in order to help my reader understand ...

Formulating a Thesis Statement

The process of formulating a thesis can facilitate the writing process and help structure the paper. Writers who develop a tentative thesis early in the research process are more likely to address their research material critically. Writers who begin their papers with a clear thesis are less likely to produce papers that are poorly structured or off topic. Here are a few examples of weak, better, and the best thesis statements:

Weak: Some movies made for theatres are censored before being shown on television.
This states a fact, not a contestable argument.

Weak: This essay will examine the arguments for and against censoring movies on television.
This is a statement of the topic; it does not reflect a point of view.

Weak: The censoring of movies shown on television is a controversial topic.
Again, this statement presents a fact with no clear position.

Weak: Should movies be censored when shown on television?
This is a question, and does not reveal the writer's position.

Weak: I am opposed to the censoring of movies shown on television.
Better, but the emphasis on 'I' reduces the impact of the thesis.

Better: Movies made for theatres should not be censored before being shown on television.
This thesis presents a definite viewpoint, but no reasoning is given.

Best: Current television regulations violate the producers' right to freedom of artistic expression and the viewer's right to freedom of choice, because they do not acknowledge how context changes how one understands content and word choice.
This thesis presents a definite position or argument and highlights the reasons supporting the argument. Note how this version of the thesis also helps the readers anticipate the structure of the paper to follow.

¹ Based on: Rosenwasser, D., & Stephen, J. (2000). *Writing analytically*. Philadelphia, PA: Harcourt College Publishers.

² Booth, W., Colomb, G., & Williams, J. (2008). *The craft of research*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Common Mistakes

The bad: Thesis statements that don't argue anything

- The Canadian government hasn't had a coalition government since 1920.
- Coalition governments have been successful in Australia, Germany and Israel.

The ugly: Thesis statements that introduce the topic, but don't reflect a point of view

- This essay will examine the argument for and against coalition governments in parliamentary democracy.
- Should Canada consider a coalition government as a reflection of voter's preferences?

The good: Thesis statements that take a position on an issue

- I am opposed to a coalition government in Canada. (Note: weak, "I" reduces impact; also, why are you opposed?)
- A Canadian coalition government would reflect the voters' choices. (Note: weak because it tells a position but not how it would be supported).
- Although coalition governments have functioned in other countries, a Canadian coalition government would be ineffective because it would increase regionalism, lengthen parliamentary debate, and likely lead to more frequent elections. (Note: Stronger because it takes a position and offers how it will be supported).

³ Based on: Procter, M. (n.d.) *Using thesis statements*. Retrieved November 2, 2010 from <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca>

ACTIVITY

Write an original strong thesis statement following up the

CHECKLIST:

- Does my thesis demonstrate analysis?
- Does my thesis pass the “so what” question by supporting its relevance?
- Does my thesis show that I am focused on depth, not breadth?
- Does my thesis reflect the argument that I use in my conclusion?
- Is my thesis clear and concise?
- Would the reader be able to understand my paper organization and topic from the introduction?

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