

Writing a Thesis Statement

When you are ready to begin writing an essay, you are ready to think about the thesis and organization. At heart, a thesis is very simple: it is the main idea of your paper, and it answers the question or questions posed by your essay. A thesis statement, usually placed at the end of your introductory paragraph, states the main idea of your essay, often states or implies your attitude or opinion about the subject, and gives your essay **direction**. It is the controlling force behind every word and every sentence. It is a commitment to your reader that you will discuss the idea presented in your thesis and *no other*.

Note: Sometimes a thesis also presents the points that will be covered in the body paragraphs of the essay. Writers who tend to skip steps find that listing points helps them to be more thorough. **As you advance in your level of writing, instructors may request that you omit listing points of development.**

After you construct your thesis, carefully evaluate the points you plan to make in the body of the essay. Make sure they do not overlap, are not too broad, and are not too narrow:

- ✓ Make sure your points are distinct and separate. Otherwise, you risk covering the same material more than once.

Example Thesis with Overlap: Although I enjoy my job, I sometimes tire of the long hours, the stress, and the pressure.

Example with Overlap Eliminated: Although I enjoy my job, I sometimes tire of the long hours, the stress, and the low pay.

- ✓ Avoid ideas that are too broad. If you are aware that many books have been written on that point, for example, it is probably too much to cover in a paragraph or an essay.

Example Thesis that is Too Broad: Losing weight, controlling my temper, and improving myself are some New Year's resolutions I am trying to keep this year.

Example with Broadness Eliminated: Losing weight, controlling my temper, and learning to cook are some New Year's resolutions I am trying to keep this year.

- ✓ Avoid points that are so limited that you will have difficulty expanding them into paragraphs.

Example Thesis that is Too Narrow: Growing up with three sisters has taught me to stand up for myself, to share my hairdryer, and to cherish my family ties.

Example with Narrowness Eliminated: Growing up with three sisters has taught me to stand up for myself, to share, and to cherish my family ties.

Although a thesis is a very specific statement that should be supported with very specific evidence, it's often necessary to *change* your thesis statement as you write and revise your essay. Just be sure to review your thesis before finishing your paper to assure that it accurately reflects your **final** draft.

Types of Thesis Statements

The kind of thesis that your paper will have depends on the purpose of your writing. A thesis statement usually consists of **two** parts: your topic and then the analysis, explanation, or assertion that you are making about the topic.

Expository (Explanatory) Thesis Statement

In an expository paper, you are explaining something to your audience. Your thesis statement should contain:

- ❑ The subject or topic you will explain
- ❑ The purpose or goal of your explanation

Example: Abraham Lincoln’s stance on slavery evolved throughout his presidency.

Argumentative Thesis Statement

In an argumentative essay, you are making a claim and supporting this claim with evidence. The claim may be a position, a proposal, an evaluation, a cause/effect analysis, or an interpretation. The key to argumentation is that you advance a controversial issue. Your thesis statement should contain:

- ❑ The issue your essay addresses
- ❑ Your claim or assertion about that issue

Example: Both parents should share equally in the responsibilities of raising their children.

Analytical Thesis Statement

In an analytical essay, you are breaking down an issue into its parts, evaluating the issue, and presenting this breakdown and evaluation to your audience. Your thesis statement should contain:

- ❑ The object or subject being analyzed
- ❑ An evaluation of the object or subject being analyzed

Example: An analysis of Steve Sack’s political cartoon “Don’t Bully” reveals the underlying message that although President Trump appears to stand behind the First Lady’s anti-bullying initiative, he truly believes he is above the issue and can bully whomever he chooses.

Works Cited

Arlow, Pamela. Wordsmith: a Guide to College Writing. New Jersey: Pearson, 2004.

“Writing a Thesis Statement,” by Erin Karper of the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University, August 2002.

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