



Creating Effective Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement reflects the focus of your essay and tells the reader what to expect in the paper. It summarizes the writer's central claim and is developed and supported in your paper by examples and evidence. Please note that your topic may change as you write so you may need to rework your thesis as to reflect your paper's needs. It is usually at the end of the first paragraph and typically is one sentence and does not exceed two.

Tips for Writing a Thesis Statement

Clear and concise: Keep your thesis statement free of vague and unnecessary words. Make your point clear and understandable.

Think of a thesis as a guide: A good thesis guides the reader through your paper right from the start. It includes your stance on a subject and reasons you stand where you do. Note: Do this without saying "This paper is about... because...."

Arguable: In order for a thesis to be good, it must be possible to argue another side. For example, you would not want to argue that the letter A is the first letter of the alphabet, as there is no opposing stance.

Be specific: A thesis should have a narrow focus. A paper with a broad thesis attempts to cover too much ground. When the focus is limited to a highly specified topic, the paper can explore the argument in depth.

Test your thesis's strength:

If your thesis can pass these test questions, you have a strong thesis; if it does not, you may need to work it out a bit more

Does the thesis pass the "So what" test? If the reader asks "So what," in response to your thesis, you need to clarify your point more, or show them the importance of your argument.

Does the thesis pass the "How" or "Why" tests? If your readers ask how or why in response to your thesis, it is not specific enough.

Does my thesis answer the question posed by the assignment? If you are writing this paper for a class assignment, make sure you are answering the prompt given.

Does my thesis take a new stance or a unique look at an old topic? If your topic is one that has been researched extensively and much of the information on the topic is common knowledge, you will want to take a fresh, unexamined perspective on it. Be sure the thesis reflects your new stance clearly.

Does my essay support my thesis directly and cohesively? Make sure your essay information relates back to your thesis.

Examples:

Poor Thesis: *Recycling paper and plastic products reduces the amount of waste on the planet.*

ISSUES:

- Not new nor arguable
- Does not answer *so what?*, *why?*, or *how?* questions
- Does not answer *so what?* question



Strong Thesis: *Setting up programs that recycle paper and plastic products in the food service industry is plausible and will greatly reduce the amount of waste the city of Chicago creates every month.*

WHAT IS DONE WELL:

- Answers the *how?* question
- Clear and specific topic
- Arguable
- Acts to guide the reader through the paper
- Argues a new stance that has not been argued repeatedly

Poor Thesis: *Marge Piercy's "Barbie Doll" is an important poem in literature.*

ISSUES:

- Does not answer *so what?, why?, or how?* questions
- Does not guide the reader through the paper
- The topic of literature is broad
- Difficult to argue another side if no reasons given to support this argument
- Should be justified by support

Strong Thesis: *To truly show the importance of her topic, in her poem "Barbie Doll," Piercy uses a specific free verse stanza form and varying rhythmic techniques to tell each part of the girl's story, as well as strong imagery that connects with the reader from beginning to end.*

WHAT IS DONE WELL:

- Answers the *how?* question
- Clear and specific topic
- Sides are arguable
- Acts to guide the reader through the paper
- Answers a new question that has not been argued repeatedly

WORKS CONSULTED:

- Illinois University at Urbana-Champaign Writing Center
- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center
- The American University in Cairo

Further Assistance: For more detailed help or if you have questions, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library, or call 815-836-5427.