

Thesis Statements: What you need to know

- A thesis statement is an arguable assertion that can be proven with evidence and opinions
- Ask yourself: Can I disagree? You want to be able to answer YES because then you have a reason to write the paper in order to prove or defend the thesis
- A thesis statement is often (but not always) one sentence and is most often located in the introductory paragraph
- When writing about reading, the thesis should be an opinion on or interpretation of the text
- A thesis should be effective. It should be an opinion, not a fact; it should be limited, not too broad; and it should be sharply focused, not too vague
- A thesis should be creative, original, and interesting
- A good thesis will have a strong "So what?" Like this: So what is the significance or importance of the topic? So what can be learned? So what is the consequence or impact? So why should people care or be concerned?
- Effective thesis formula: Topic + opinion + So what?

OKAY, SO WHAT IS A THESIS STATEMENT AGAIN, EXACTLY?

The basic point or main idea of the whole essay is its thesis. A thesis is often an assertion that you argue or support in the essay. Having a thesis is useful to both the writer and the reader as it links the main ideas of the essay and explains the writer's opinion on those ideas. If you have problems with your thesis, try to follow these two conventions:

1. A thesis statement is often (but not always) one sentence and is most often placed in the introductory paragraph.
2. A thesis statement is an arguable assertion that can be proven with evidence and opinions.

WHAT IS A THESIS GOOD FOR?

- A thesis helps you narrow down the more general topic and find your own angle on the topic and express your opinion
- A thesis is a reader-oriented strategy: it lets the reader know what to expect or look for in the essay
- A well formed thesis is also a writer-oriented strategy: it helps you develop and cover all parts of an assignment, helps you know when you are "done," and keeps you organized, helping you determine if you are wandering off in unrelated directions

WHAT DO EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENTS LOOK LIKE?

An effective thesis should be a generalization, not a fact; it should be limited, not too broad; and it should be sharply focused, not too vague.

Too Factual: The first polygraph was developed by Dr. John A. Larson in 1921.

Revised: Because the polygraph has not been proved reliable, even under controlled conditions, its use by private employers should be banned.

Too Broad: Many drugs are now being used successfully to treat mental illnesses.

Revised: Despite its risks and side effects, lithium is an effective treatment for depression.

Too Vague: Many of the songs played on station WXQP are disgusting.

Revised: Of the songs played on station WXQP, all too many depict sex crudely, sanction the beating or rape of women, or foster gang violence.

PRACTICE LOCATING OPINION WORDS IN THESIS STATEMENTS:

Opinion: A thesis should contain a topic (*what* you are writing about), an opinion about the topic (what your *attitude* is toward the topic), and reasons why you hold that view (explanations answering “*why?*” or “*so what?*”). In other words, a thesis needs to be an arguable assertion that can be proven with facts and opinions. To check to see if a thesis is arguable, locate the opinion words.

Locating the Opinion in a Thesis: When you look for the opinion in a thesis, ask yourself: What is the writer’s attitude towards the topic? For example, in the sentence “Backpacking in the mountains last year was an exciting experience,” the topic is “backpacking” and the controlling idea is that this trip was “exciting.” Another person on the same trip might have had a different attitude and may have found the trip boring or exhausting. “Exciting” reveals the writer’s attitude and also indicates what the essay with this thesis statement will be focused on: demonstrating why it was “exciting.” This thesis statement limits the writer’s focus and clearly tells the reader what the essay will be about.

Underline the opinion words below. If there are no opinion words, it is not a thesis:

1. Much maligned and the subject of unwarranted fears, most bats are harmless.
2. Vigorous exercise is a good way to reduce the effects of stress on the body.
3. Buffalo and Toronto differ in four major ways.
4. Developing color film is more complicated than developing black and white.
5. In this essay I will discuss abortion.
6. Television is destroying the unity of the modern family.
7. In her essay, Erlich shows that there is a balance of community and isolation in her hometown.

HOW DO I CREATE A THESIS STATEMENT?

There are many approaches...here are some methods:

- ***Answer the question or respond to the writing task directly:*** One way to create a thesis statement is to directly answer the assigned question. If the writing assignment is not in the form of a question, then respond to the task. When responding to a writing assignment, be sure that you have responded directly to what is being asked. Make sure that you address all parts of the assignment.
- ***Brainstorm and freewrite to “discover” your argument:*** If there is no specific writing assignment, begin by brainstorming (listing key words and concepts) and freewriting (writing informally) on your topic. See what emerges as to what specific aspects interest you. State your opinion on one of these aspects and examine the significance of this opinion. Why is this important? What are the implications?
- ***Connect your ideas under one joining sentence:*** If you have done some brainstorming, freewriting, outlining or drafting of the paper, and have many ideas but not a thesis yet, look at your main ideas or main supporting points. What do these ideas have in common? What overall argument connects those ideas? Answer this to create your thesis statement.

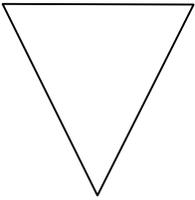
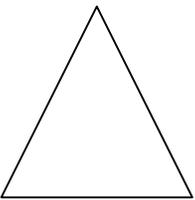
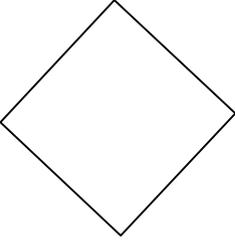
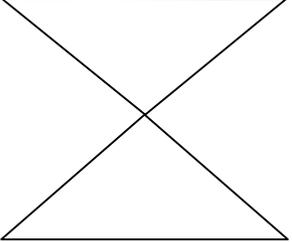
WHERE DO I PUT A THESIS AND HOW DIRECT SHOULD I BE?

Some writers have the thesis at the end of the essay on purpose, thinking that if they save the main point until the end of the essay, the reader is forced to read the entire essay to discover the main point. While it's true that this happens in a lot of narratives (stories) and fiction, this is rarely the most effective place for the thesis in academic writing.

Stated Thesis Statements: Research shows that you comprehend better when the thesis is directly stated, particularly when it is stated at the beginning of a passage. Such an initial thesis statement offers a signpost briefing you on what to expect and overviews the author's message. Unfortunately, writers do not always follow this pattern. In a research study using psychology texts, the main idea was clearly stated in only 58 percent of the sampled paragraphs. Thus, you should be skilled in both locating and, especially, constructing thesis statements.

Implied Thesis Statements: When the thesis is not directly stated, it is said to be *implied*, which means that it is suggested from the thoughts that are revealed. In such a case, the author has presented a complete idea, but for reasons of style and impact has chosen not to express it concisely in one sentence. As a reader, it is your job to systematically connect the details and focus on the message.

Locations for Stated Thesis Statements:

<p>An introductory statement of the thesis is given at the beginning of the paragraph:</p> <p>Main Idea 1. Detail 2. Detail 3. Detail 4. Detail</p> 	<p>A concluding statement of the thesis appears at the end of the paragraph:</p> <p>1. Detail 2. Detail 3. Detail 4. Detail Main Idea</p> 
<p>Details are placed at the beginning to arouse interest, followed by a statement of the thesis in the middle of the paragraph:</p> <p>1. Detail 2. Detail Main Idea 3. Detail 4. Detail</p> 	<p>Both the introductory and concluding sentences state the thesis:</p> <p>Main Idea 1. Detail 2. Detail 3. Detail 4. Detail Main Idea</p> 

For Implied Thesis Statements:

Details combine to make a point but the thesis is not directly stated:

- 1. Detail**
- 2. Detail**
- 3. Detail**
- 4. Detail**



PRACTICE FINDING THE THESIS:

Don't meddle with old unloaded firearms, they are the most deadly and unerring things ever created. You don't have to take any pains with them at all; you don't have to have a rest, you don't have to have any sights on the gun, you don't have to take aim even. No, you just pick out a relative and bang away, and you are sure to get him. A youth who can't hit a cathedral at thirty yards with a Gatling gun in three-quarters of an hour, can take up an old empty musket and bag his grandmother every time at a hundred.

---Mark Twain, "Advice to Youth"

In the warmth of the inner Solar System a comet releases clouds of vapor and dust that form the glowing head and then leak into the tail, which is the cosmic equivalent of an oil slick. Pieces of the dust later hit the Earth, as meteors. A few survivors among the comets evolve into menacing lumps of dirt in tight orbits around the Sun. For these reasons comets are, in my opinion, best regarded as a conspicuous form of sky pollution.

---Nigel Calder, *The Comet is Coming*

A TV set stood close to a wall in the small living room crowded with an assortment of chairs and tables. An aquarium crowded the mantelpiece of a fake fireplace. A lighted bulb inside the tank showed many colored fish swimming about in a haze of fish food. Some of it lay scattered on the edge of the shelf. The carpet underneath was a sodden black. Old magazines and tabloids lay just about everywhere.

---Bienvenidos Santos, "Immigration Blues"