

# Thesis Statements

An effective thesis statement presents the main idea of a paper. It is not simply a title or statement of the general topic but a sentence that clearly indicates the scope of the paper and the perspective of the writer. For most academic papers, a thesis should be contained in one sentence. The thesis performs several key functions:

- Helps the writer form and organize ideas
- Requires the writer to distill his ideas down to one main point
- Acts as a test to help the writer determine whether information should be included
- Guides the reader through the paper so he or she can keep the main point in mind

## Placement

Readers expect a thesis statement to appear at the end of the introductory paragraph. If you have a good reason to place it elsewhere, such as presenting background information first, then it is possible to put it later in the paper, but make sure the reader can still recognize it as the thesis statement

## Perspective

The perspective of the thesis statement depends on the type of paper you are writing.

### — INFORMATIVE/EXPOSITORY ESSAY —

If your paper is informative, you need only present the narrowed topic that the reader will learn about. Your thesis will not express any type of opinion, but rather introduce the information that will be covered. If you need to explain how a court case reaches the United States Supreme Court, a possible thesis might be...

#### ***Example***

*Cases heard by the United States Supreme Court come from a variety of lower courts and must meet certain requirements.*

### — PERSUASIVE/ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY —

For most academic assignments, the thesis statement will make an arguable claim that will be supported in order to persuade the reader of your perspective on an issue. For the same topic as above, an arguable thesis might be...

#### ***Example***

*The current system of governmental checks and balances should be revised because the Supreme Court wields too much power.*

### — ANALYSIS —

In this type of essay, the thesis will indicate the position you are taking, although it may not technically seem like an argument. For example, in a literary analysis, you may need to defend your interpretation of a character or symbol. For a piece of art, you may need to demonstrate how the elements come together to create a certain effect or message. The thesis will still need to be supported by details, but those details will come from the text/work.

## Generating a Clear Thesis Statement

- Begin by **carefully reading the assignment** so you understand what perspective is appropriate and what elements are required, including length.
- **Explore the topic.** This may include research depending on the assignment or may just involve pre-writing, such as brainstorming.
- **Narrow the topic** so that it is manageable within the given length. If you try to cover too much, you won't be able to effectively support your viewpoint.
- Write a **working thesis statement** that expresses the main focus of the essay, including your position if necessary to the assignment. In the next few steps you will review what you have written for key elements.
- Make sure it **takes a stand** (unless for an informative essay). It should not just announce your topic, such as *This paper is about why pesticides are harmful to humans.*
- **Check for unity.** Is more than one idea included? *College students who struggle with depression need to seek help and colleges should offer free on-campus counseling.* If so, perhaps you really have only one point but you need to show a relationship between the two ideas: *Because a significant percentage of college students struggle with depression, colleges should offer free counseling on campus.*
- **Make sure it is specific** enough. Does the thesis statement clearly indicate what portion of the topic is being addressed? Is it too broad for the length of the assignment? In a complicated topic, you can't expect to convince the reader of multiple elements in a relatively short paper. For example, compare these two statements:
  - *Schools should offer healthier choices to students.*
  - *Because half of all American elementary school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar, schools should be required to replace the beverages in soda machines with healthy alternatives.*

The first statement doesn't indicate the paper will focus on food choices at all, nor that it addresses sugar consumption rather than other unhealthy elements like fat or preservatives. The second one gives more guidance to the reader about what the paper will actually include.

- **Indicate or imply the supporting points.** You don't have to specifically state your main areas of support in the thesis (unless asked to do so by the instructor), but it should be implied or hinted at. The reader should have a sense of where the paper is headed.
- Review the language for **clarity**. Can the statement easily be understood by your intended reader? Is it clear what position you are taking? Are your word choices too vague?
- Review the language for **conciseness**. Is the sentence too long or too wordy? Get to the point.
- **Get input.** Ask a family member or classmate to read the thesis and tell you what he or she thinks the paper will be about. If they are wrong, perhaps something is not clear enough or specific enough.
- **Check for grammatical errors** such as comma placement or incorrect parallelism.

