How To Write a Thesis Statement

What is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement is an essay’s main idea summarized in one or two sentences. It’s like a contract with your readers; it’s the statement you’ll support with the evidence and specific details.

Why Should Your Essay Contain a Thesis Statement?

- to test your ideas by distilling them into a sentence or two
- to better organize and develop your argument
- to provide your reader with a “guide” to your argument

In general, your thesis statement will accomplish these goals if you think of the thesis as the answer to the question your paper explores.

A good thesis statement will usually include the following four attributes:

- take on a subject upon which reasonable people could disagree
- deal with a subject that can be adequately treated given the nature of the assignment
- express one main idea (although more sophisticated papers may examine multiple ideas)
- assert your conclusions about a subject

Tips for Writing Your Thesis Statement

1. Determine what kind of paper you are writing:

   - An analytical paper breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or idea, and presents this breakdown and evaluation to the audience.
   - An expository (explanatory) paper explains something to the audience.
   - An argumentative paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. The claim could be an opinion, a policy proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation. The goal of the argumentative paper is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided.

If you are writing a text that does not fall under these three categories (ex. a narrative), a thesis
statement somewhere in the first paragraph could still be helpful to your reader.

2. Your thesis statement should be specific—it should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence.

3. The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of a paper.

4. Your topic may change as you write, so you may need to revise your thesis statement to reflect exactly what you have discussed in the paper. You might want to think about your thesis as a working thesis statement, as an idea that will change and become clearer as you write.

How to Tell a Strong Thesis Statement from a Weak One

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 strong 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 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 strong 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 expresses one main idea.**

Readers need to be able to see that your paper has one main point. If your thesis statement expresses more than one idea, then you might confuse your readers about the subject of your paper. For example:

**Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and Web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.**

This is a weak thesis statement because the reader can’t decide whether the paper is about marketing on the Internet or Web pages. To revise the thesis, the relationship between the two ideas needs to become clear. One way to revise the thesis would be to write:

**Because the Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using Web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.**

This is a strong thesis because it shows that the two ideas are related. Hint: a great many clear and engaging thesis statements contain words like *because, since, so, although, unless, and however.*

4. **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 strong 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.