

Thesis Statements

A thesis is not only the subject of your essay or paper, it is the idea you are communicating about your topic as well. It should be broad enough to cover your material but narrowed enough that you will have a clear focus.

Defining your audience narrows down the subject, but the topic also requires that you make choices. From notes you created as you researched your topic, select what you will actually use. Now is the time to decide on the thesis.

To form a thesis, start with a piece of your subject that is of real interest to you. Ideally, you should know more about your topic than your reader. Decide what the "message" is that you want to communicate. State your message clearly and make sure it is one that matters to your reader.

Definition of a Thesis Statement

1. The thesis statement is your paper in a nutshell. In one declarative sentence it tells the reader what main idea the writer plans to develop.
2. It is a promise to readers to present one idea in a fully developed manner.
3. It is used chiefly in expository essays such as argumentative, analytical, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, etc.
4. The thesis statement is *always* a complete sentence. (Never use phrases or fragments to convey a thesis such as "Why I enrolled in college" or "The main reason schools raise tuition").
5. A thesis is *never* written as a question like "Are you going to graduate this semester?" or "Can the space mission improve our economy?" The answer to the question will bring you closer to a proper thesis statement.
6. The thesis is *never* an exclamation, leaving nothing more to say that is not repetitious. NO: "The Beatles are the greatest!" The thesis statement is a tool to help define, focus, and nail down exactly what you want to write about.
7. The thesis is never merely a statement of intent, which is the central idea as: "In this paper, I want to show why our space program is important to the economy. The thesis clearly outlines what you plan to say in your paper as: "The space program helps our economy by providing jobs, exploring agricultural possibilities, and identifying possible vacation destinations."
8. A thesis statement reflects the attitude of the writer and gives a point of view but is not an obvious statement generally known by the average intelligent reader. For instance, "John Paull! was Pope of the Catholic Church." A good thesis statement will answer the obvious "so what" response of the reader.
9. A good thesis statement is restricted, unified, and precise.

Restricted

The thesis sentence must clearly state the one idea the paper is going to develop. This narrows or limits the focus of the paper to what can be fully developed and discussed in the space available.

Non-restricted: "If we are to survive in our civilization, we need to solve the problems of pollution, overpopulation, and war."

This thesis would be difficult to develop and discuss fully in the scope of a college paper. To restrict a thesis sentence, identify the parts (three in this statement) and concentrate on only the one part you are most familiar with.

Restricted: The military's decision to dump its accumulation of chemicals in the Southwestern United States is creating a serious pollution danger to the American public.

Unified

For a thesis to be unified, it must express only one dominant idea. While you may have many ideas to develop, only one should be emphasized and others should be subordinate, or supporting points.

Non-unified: "Trips to other countries are exciting adventures which are also educational, but it is difficult to fit them to everybody's schedules and impractical."

This example has three ideas. You might choose to talk about the excitement, or the education, or the difficulty in scheduling a trip. Make one idea the dominant idea then either subordinate or eliminate the others.

Unified: "The difficulty of coordinating everyone's schedules for educational visits to another country makes a trip impractical."

Precise

A thesis should be written so that it can have only one interpretation. Avoid vague words (interesting, inspiring, unusual, etc). Also avoid metaphors (far out, like water to a plant, the test was a bear, etc).

Non-precise: "My hobby is a very interesting activity for people."

A thesis statement should answer the questions: "*What do I mean by that?*" "*In what way?*" "*How?*" "*What am I getting at?*"

Precise: Tatting had its origins in the late 1700s, and as a hobby it attracts enthusiasts from preteens to the elderly.

Checklist for the Thesis

1. The message I am communicating in this paper is ...
2. I am the appropriate person to write on this thesis because I am knowledgeable of the topic. I am writing this from the point of view of ...
3. My reader knows clearly the focus of the topic I am writing about. I tell my reader the big message I want to get across which is my thesis on page _____ in paragraph _____