



**The Weissman Center for Leadership and the Liberal Arts
The Speaking, Arguing, and Writing Program
122 Porter Hall**

Writing a Thesis Statement

What is a thesis statement? Why do I need one?

A thesis statement is a sentence (or two) that presents the main idea of your written work. It should be part of the introductory paragraph so that the reader will know immediately what subject will be discussed in the paper. Since readers will decide quickly if a piece of writing is worth reading, your thesis statement should be dynamic and direct. The thesis statement will also help you stay focused on your topic, purpose, audience, and stance on the subject.

Tips for writing thesis statements:

- A thesis statement is generally made up of two parts: the subject to be discussed in the paper and the assertion you are making in your paper about that subject.
- You may wish to start with a working thesis to help guide you through the research and writing process. This working thesis may be adjusted as more information is gathered and your assertion changes or your topic is narrowed. Your final thesis statement might not materialize until a draft of the paper is completed. The following steps may be taken to help you write your working thesis:
 - Begin by prewriting (brainstorming, freewriting, mapping, listing, and questioning).
 - Find trends in your prewriting that illustrate your perspective on the topic and the direction you would like to go in with your paper.
- A thesis statement is a very specific statement. If your thesis statement is too broad, you will have difficulty managing your topic.
- Use the thesis statement to captivate the reader. Make your assertion about the topic as clear as you can.
- Consider the type of paper you are writing when constructing a thesis statement. A thesis statement for an analytical paper will be different from a thesis statement for an argumentative paper. Be sure to consider your audience and purpose for writing your paper when creating your thesis statement.
- Revise your thesis statement as you write your paper. Your thesis statement should be consistent with the overall focus and subject of your paper.

Considerations for different types of papers:

Papers Written to Explain a Topic/Issue to an Audience:

- The thesis statement for this type of paper should tell your reader what you will be explaining in the paper as well as the categories, structure, and organization of your paper.
- Explanatory thesis statements tend not to include dramatic assertions. These thesis statements often look like concise lists of categories to be covered in your paper and are written in sentence form.

Example: Many factors influence a student's performance in school, including the teacher/student relationship, the family structure at home, and a student's self-image.

Papers Written to Present an Argument:

- The thesis statement for this type of paper is written to state your claim about your topic and to give an overview of the evidence supporting your claim.
- Argumentative thesis statements must be presented about a topic with which a reader could disagree. The purpose of your paper will be to convince the reader of your assertion about the topic.

Example: Teachers should hold high expectations for all students because some students will exert only as much effort needed to meet expectations.

Papers Written to Analyze a Topic:

- The thesis statement for an analytical paper will inform the reader about how you are examining the topic.
- This type of thesis statement may sound less assertive than an argumentative statement.

Example: A teacher's expectation of a student is based on three things: a student's past performance, a student's socioeconomic background, and how a student's parents value education.

Sources:

Lunsford, Andrea. *The St. Martin's Handbook*. 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2003.

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