

## Johnson County Community College

# THESIS

### A THESIS STATEMENT IS...

1. your paper in a nutshell; that is, it tells the reader what **main idea the writer is going to develop**. (More importantly, it helps the writer discover what main idea he or she wants to develop.) **The thesis statement, remember, is not an end in itself, but a tool that will help you define, focus, nail down exactly what you want to write about.**)
2. a **promise to the reader to develop** such-and-such an idea in such-and-such a manner.
3. **used chiefly in expository essays** (argumentative, analytical, comparison/contrast, etc.).
4. always a **complete sentence**. (Never phrases or fragments such as "Why I am a music major" or "The main problem with our schools".)
5. **never a question** like "Who is the best tackle in the NFL?" or "Why are space missions so important to our economy?"

(NOTE: **Answer the question, and you are closer to having a thesis statement.**)

6. **never an exclamation**: "I love the Beatles!" "Skin diving is the greatest!" (An exclamation leaves you nothing more to say that is not repetitious.)
7. **never merely a statement of intent**; for example, "In this paper I want to show why our membership in NA TO is so essential to world peace." A statement of intent tells the reader what you plan to say. The thesis statement is a saying of the thing itself: "Our membership in NA TO is essential to world peace."
8. **never an obvious statement**, something generally known by the average intelligent reader. For instance, "Walter Cronkite is the anchorman for CBS News." Such statements usually elicit the deserved "So what?" response. **A good thesis statement answers the "So what?" question.**
9. a **statement of an opinion about an idea**, reflecting your attitude or point of view toward it.
10. **restricted, unified, precise.**

**To be restricted, the thesis statement must show the one idea the paper is going to develop.** It thus limits (or narrows down) the scope of the paper to what can be discussed intelligently in the space available.

A non-restricted thesis: "If our civilization is to survive, we must solve the problems of overpopulation, pollution, and war."

**TO RESTRICT A THESIS STATEMENT, BREAK THE UNRESTRICTED THESIS INTO ITS PARTS AND CONCENTRATE ON A PART YOU KNOW ABOUT.**

The above non-restricted thesis can be made into three different, restricted theses:

- A) The invasion of Fort Lauderdale by hundred of college students during the spring vacation results in pollution of that city's beaches.
- B) A good part of the smog problem in Los Angeles is caused by the increased number of people who must drive considerable distances to and from work in the city.

C) The army's need to find some place to dump its accumulation of chemicals presents a serious pollution danger, especially in the Southwestern states.

**To be unified, a thesis statement must express only one dominant idea.**

A non-unified thesis: "Flights to the Moon are thrilling adventures which also produce practical benefits, yet it is difficult to justify their costs."

TO UNIFY, DECIDE WHICH IDEA YOU WANT TO EMPHASIZE AND WHICH IDEA OR IDEAS YOU WISH TO SUBORDINATE.

In the above example you can choose from talking about a) the thrill b) the practical benefits or c) justification of costs. Make one of these dominant; subordinate or eliminate the others.

For example: "The costs of moon flights are too great to be justified by the thrills and practical results we get from them."

**To be precise, a thesis should be so stated that it can have only ONE interpretation.**

A non-precise thesis: "My hometown is a very interesting place for fishermen."

TO MAKE A THESIS STATEMENT PRECISE, AVOID VAGUE WORDS (*interesting, colorful, inspiring, unusual, difficult, etc.*) AND METAPHORS (*far out, just the thing, a bad trip, like water to a plant, the test was a bear, etc.*).

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS:

"WHAT DO I MEAN BY THAT?"

"IN WHAT WAY?"

"HOW?"

"WHAT AM I GETTING AT?"

A more precise thesis: "The well-stocked farm ponds, trout streams, and salmon hatcheries that surround my hometown make the area a haven for fishing enthusiasts."

--Based on a handout created by the Writing Center at Purdue University

**A CHECKLIST FOR THE THESIS**

1. The message I am communicating in this paper is...
2. I am the appropriate person to write about this topic because I am an insider on the subject. I know it from the point of view of...
3. I have clearly let my reader know the topic I am writing about by stating it on page \_\_\_ in paragraph \_\_\_\_\_. My thesis, or the main message I want to convey, is stated on page \_\_\_ in paragraph \_\_\_\_\_.
4. This thesis will matter to my readers, because...