



WRITING CENTER

The Thesis Statement

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THE THESIS STATEMENT

The thesis statement is the core of your paper in one sentence; it tells the reader the main idea you will develop in the paper. Because the thesis statement helps to discover that idea, it should be one of the earliest parts of your writing process; thesis statements are useful tools to define and focus exactly what you want to write about.

WHAT A THESIS STATEMENT IS:

- A vital part of expository essays (compare and contrast, argumentative, analytical, etc.).
- A promise to the reader to develop a particular idea in a particular manner.
- A complete sentence. It is never a phrase or fragment such as “Why i am a music major” or “The main problem with our schools.”

WHAT A THESIS STATEMENT IS NOT:

- A question, such as “Who is the best tackle in the NFL?”, or “Why are space missions so important to our economy?”
- An exclamation, such as “I love the Beatles!”, or “The Lincoln Memorial is the greatest!”
- A mere statement of intent, such as “In this paper I want to show why our membership in NATO is so essential to world peace.”
- An obvious statement: something that is generally known by the average reader, such as “The United States is a country in North America.”

CRAFTING A THESIS STATEMENT

A thesis statement should be a statement about an idea, which reflects your attitude or point of view toward that idea. It should be restricted, unified, and precise, outlining the one idea the paper is going to develop. In this way it limits the scope of the paper to what can be discussed in the space available.

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TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS TO CREATE A THESIS STATEMENT

1. **Develop a simple, non-restricted thesis that expresses your main idea.**

This step can be the most difficult. In order to make it easier to arrive at your main idea:

- Think of an important question. For example: "How can our civilization survive into the future?" If you can answer the question you have in mind, you are closer to having a thesis statement.
- Make a statement of intent; write down what you plan to say, then say it out loud. For example: "Our membership in NATO is essential to world peace."
- Ask yourself "So what?" A good thesis statement answers the "So what?" question and helps readers to see why your idea is important.

After going through these steps, you should arrive at a simple, non-restricted thesis, such as: "If we are to survive, we must solve the problems of overpopulation, pollution, and war."

2. **Restrict the unrestricted thesis.**

Break the unrestricted thesis into parts and concentrate on what you know something about. The following statements show different aspects of one issue (pollution) that you could develop.

- The invasion of Fort Lauderdale by hundreds of college students during the spring vacation results in pollution of that city's beaches.
- A portion of the smog problem in Los Angeles is caused by the increased number of people who drive considerable distances to and from work in the city.
- The army's need to find a place to dump its accumulation of chemicals presents a serious pollution danger, especially in the Southwestern states.

3. **Make it precise.**

While restricting your thesis, you must also be precise. A precise thesis has only one interpretation. To make it 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?", and "What am I getting at?"

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Example: VAGUE: My hometown is a very interesting place for fishermen.
PRECISE: The well-stocked farm ponds, trout streams, and salmon hatcheries that surround my hometown make the area a haven for fishing enthusiasts. *The more precise example answers all the questions above.*

4. Unify your thesis.

To be unified, a thesis statement must express only one dominant idea. To unify the thesis, decide which idea you want to emphasize and which idea or ideas you wish to make secondary or less important.

In the non-unified example below, you could choose between talking about the thrilling adventures of Moon flights; their practical benefits; or how their costs cannot be justified. Make one of these dominant; subordinate or remove the others.

Example: NON-UNIFIED: Flights to the Moon are thrilling adventures which also produce practical benefits, yet it is difficult to justify their costs.
UNIFIED: The costs of moon flights are too great to be justified by the thrills and practical results we get from them.

THESIS CHECKLIST

Ask yourself:

- What is the message I am communicating in this paper?
- Why will this thesis matter to my readers?
- Have I clearly let my reader know what exactly I am writing about, without leaving room for multiple interpretations of my thesis?
- Is my thesis restricted enough to thoroughly discuss it in the number of pages I have?
- Is my thesis specific and focused, expressing only one dominant idea?
- **For argumentative essays:** Is my thesis debatable? (That is, something readers might agree or disagree with.)
- **For reports:** Does my thesis take a fresh approach to the topic, avoiding clichéd terms and phrasing, while clearly stating what I will discuss?