

Developing a Thesis Statement

The objectives of this handout are to:

1. Help the writer understand the definition and nature of a thesis statement.
2. To recognize a weak or general thesis sentence.
3. To be able to write specific, focused thesis sentences.
4. To demonstrate the above competences by developing thesis for given topics.

DEFINITION:

The "thesis statement" is a type of controlling statement (see SLAC Writing Aid #1) which introduces the topic of a theme in a special way. An adequate thesis statement accomplishes four things. It (1) identifies a limited idea or subject, (2) states a point or view or expresses an attitude toward the subject, and (3) restricts the discussion while (4) establishing the major areas of discussion. An example, with the four elements identified, is:

Tabletop photography is expensive because of the necessary financial

(1)

(2)

(3)

investment in cameras, special equipment, and supplies.

(4)

The thesis statement, when written correctly, actually provides a summary, or outline, of your central ideas into one or two sentences. As you can see, the thesis statement is especially suitable to the argument or persuasive essay. Your thesis is the backbone of your paper: the main point, the central idea. Your thesis is a one-sentence statement about your topic. It's an assertion about your topic, something you claim to be true. Notice that a topic alone makes not such claim; it merely defines an area to be covered. The topic is seldom stated as a complete sentence with a subject and predicate. To make your topic into a *thesis statement*, you need to make a claim about it. Look back over your materials-branching charts, free writings, investigative notes-and think about what you believe to be true. Think about what your readers want or need to know. Then write a sentence, preferably at this point, a simple one, stating what will be the controlling idea of your paper.

IS YOUR THESIS STATEMENT UNIFIED?

Choose one single focus for development. Do not split the thesis between two bulky and wordy topics:

Original: Printing has had a long and complex history during which it has brought about social and cultural reforms

Revised: The development of printing sparked a series of social and cultural reforms.

Check your thesis: Are the two large statements connected loosely by a coordinate conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet)? Would a subordinate conjunction help (through, although, because, since) to signal a relationship between the two sentences? Or do the two imply an unclear unfocused thesis? If so, settle on **one** single focus and then proceed with further development.

IS YOUR THESIS STATEMENT RESTRICTED?

Your thesis statement should provide a restricted or limited focus for your essay. Narrow the field of your discussion to a specific line of a reasoning argumentation within a broad topic area. Your thesis should be limited to what can be accomplished in the specific number of pages. Shape your topic so that you can get straight to the "meat" of it; don't settle for three pages of just skimming the surface. The opposite of a focused, narrow, crisp thesis is a broad, sprawling, superficial thesis. Compare this original thesis with three possible revisions:

Original: There are serious objections to today's horror movies.

Revised:

1. Because modern cinematic techniques have allowed filmmakers to get more graphic, horror flicks have desensitized young American viewers to violence.
2. The pornographic violence in "bloodbath" slasher movies degrades both men and women.
3. Today's slasher movies fail to deliver the emotional catharsis that 1930's horror films did.

IS YOUR THESIS STATEMENT CLEAR?

Avoid vague words such as "interesting," "negative," "exciting," "unusual" and "difficult". These words are uninformative to the reader. Always avoid jargon. Check and double-check the cause and effect relationships you set up, and make sure all potential confusion is eliminated.

Original: Although the timber wolf is a timid and gentle animal, it is being systematically exterminated.

Revised: Although the timber wolf is actually a timid and gentle animal, it is being systematically exterminated because people wrongfully believe it to be a fierce and cold-blooded killer.

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