

Writing the Thesis Statement



What is it?

- for most student work, it's a one- or two-sentence statement that explicitly outlines the purpose or point of your paper.
- It is generally a complex, compound sentence

What does it do?

- it should point toward the development or course of argument the reader can expect your argument to take

Where does it go?

- because the rest of the paper will support or back up your thesis, a thesis is normally placed at or near the end of the introductory paragraph.

What does it contain?

- The thesis sentence must contain an **arguable point**.
- A thesis sentence must not simply make an observation -- for example, "Writer X seems in his novel Y to be obsessed with lipstick."
- Rather, it must assert a point that is **arguable**:
- "Writer X uses lipstick to point to his novel's larger theme: the masking and unmasking of the self."

What it determines

- The thesis sentence must control the entire argument.
- Your thesis sentence determines what you are required to say in a paper.
- It also determines what you cannot say.
- Every paragraph in your paper exists in order to support your thesis.
- Accordingly, if one of your paragraphs seems irrelevant to your thesis you have two choices: get rid of the paragraph, or **rewrite** your thesis.

Is it fixed in concrete?

- Imagine that as you are writing your paper you stumble across the new idea that lipstick is used in Writer X's novel not only to mask the self, but also to signal when the self is in crisis.
- This observation is a good one; do you really want to throw it away? Or do you want to **rewrite** your thesis so that it accommodates this new idea?

A contract

- Understand that you don't have a third option: you can't simply stick the idea in without preparing the reader for it in your thesis.
- The thesis is like a contract between you and your reader.
- If you introduce ideas that the reader isn't prepared for, you've violated that contract.

It provides structure for your paper

- The thesis sentence should provide a structure for your argument.
- A good thesis not only signals to the reader what your argument is, but how your argument will be presented.
- In other words, your thesis sentence should either directly or indirectly **suggest the structure** of your argument to your reader.
- Say, for example, that you are going to argue that "Writer X explores the masking and unmasking of the self in three curious ways: A, B, and C."
- In this case, the reader understands that you are going to have three important points to cover, and that these points will appear in a certain order.

Other Attributes

- it takes a side on a topic rather than simply announcing that the paper is about a topic (the title should have already told your reader your topic). Don't tell readers *about* something; tell them *what* about something. Answer the questions "how?" or "why?"
- it is sufficiently narrow and specific that your supporting points are necessary and sufficient, not arbitrary; paper length and number of supporting points are good guides here.

More Attributes

- it argues one main point and doesn't squeeze three different theses for three different papers into one sentence;
- And most importantly, it passes The "So What?" Test.

An Equation

- thesis statements are basically made up of your topic and a specific assertion about that topic, therefore,
- **THESIS = TOPIC + SPECIFIC ASSERTION**

Summary

**The four “shoulds”
of a thesis
statement:**

- a good thesis statement **should take a stand** - don't be afraid to have an opinion; if after your research, your opinion changes, all the better - means you have been thinking; you can write a new thesis statement!

- a good thesis statement should justify discussion - don't leave your readers saying to themselves "So what" or "duh?" or "like what's your point?"

- a good thesis statement should express one main idea or a clear relationship between two specific ideas linked by words like "because," "since," "so," "although," "unless," or "however."

Example

- Poor: Stephen King writes readable books.
- Good: Stephen King's books are so good because they are about normal people who get into supernatural situations.

- A good thesis statement should be restricted to a specific and manageable topic - readers are more likely to reward a paper that does a small task well than a paper that takes on an unrealistic task and fails

The background is a solid orange color with a pattern of stylized, darker orange leaves scattered around the edges, particularly on the left and right sides.

The End