What is the Thesis Statement?

**Definition:** The thesis statement is a *one or two sentence* encapsulation of your paper’s main point, main idea, or main message. Your paper’s thesis statement will be addressed and defended in the body paragraphs and the conclusion.

Where should I place my thesis statement?

You should provide the reader with your thesis statement early in the paper—normally as the final sentence or two of your introduction. This will let the reader know what direction the rest of your paper will follow.

Is my thesis statement too broad?

As a writer, you want to be as specific as possible. Often times, a bad paper is the result of a thesis statement—and consequently an entire paper—that generalizes a topic or an argument. For example, here is a broad thesis statement: Fast food is bad for your health. This statement, although it does state something, does not provide the reader with *specific reasons* why fast food is bad for your health. If the writer provided some specific reasons, then the reader would not only understand what the writer wants to argue, but the reader would also understand the direction of the paper. For example, if the writer gave three reasons why fast food is bad for one’s health, the reader would then understand that the rest of the paper would defend these three reasons.

Is my thesis statement arguable?

In the above example of a broad thesis statement (Fast food is bad for your health), another problem students have when writing a thesis statement presents itself: the thesis statement resorts to a simplistic pro/con statement. Many people, for example, know that too much fast food is bad for one’s health, but what is the writer’s *original and specific angle* about the topic? Some examples of bad original thesis statements and good revised thesis statements can illuminate the differences between a poor thesis statement and a well-written thesis statement.

Original Thesis: In this paper, I will discuss the relationship between fairy tales and early childhood.

Revised Thesis: Not just empty stories for kids, fairy tales shed light on the psychology of children.

Notice that the writer, in the revised thesis, tells the reader why his or her take on the issue matters.

Original Thesis: We must save the whales.

Revised Thesis: Because our planet’s health may depend upon biological diversity, we should save the whales.

Notice that the writer, in the original thesis, generalizes a complex issue. In the revised thesis, the writer has provided one *specific reason* why saving whales is important.

Final Thoughts:

A good thesis statement reflects well-crafted ideas. It also signals a writer who is committed, intelligent, and enthusiastic about his or her own ideas. Below is a final list of things a writer should do—and also avoid doing—while writing a thesis.

**Things a writer should avoid when composing a thesis statement:***

Avoid using vague or general words like “interesting” or “negative.” Instead, try to use specific language. For example, instead of writing “the movie *Seven* is too violent,” you can write, “the final scene in the movie *Seven* illustrates the violent nature of the film, which is why the film does not deserve to be on Roger Ebert’s list of “Great Movies.”
Try not to use technical language that will confuse the reader.

Do not merely announce a topic (fast food is bad).

Never oversimplify complex issues. For example, you shouldn’t write, “abortion is murder,” or “abortion should be legal everywhere” because the issue is too complex for such a simple statement. For a complex issue, you should examine a smaller, more specific aspect of the issue. When discussing abortion, for example, you could write about a topic dealing with abortion clinics or abortion laws. If you want to argue for something like “abortion is murder” or “abortion should be legal,” make sure you have done the necessary research and that your thesis statement provides well thought out reasons for your claim. It is important to remember that you want to write about something debatable, but you do not want to paint a complex and already much debated issue in simple terms.

Do not report a fact everyone already knows. Instead, expand your ideas and try to write an arguable and debatable thesis.

Never include quotations or someone else’s thoughts in your thesis.

Avoid clichés (strive for originality).

Avoid announcing the thesis statement. For example, do not write, “This essay will cover” or “I am writing this essay…” The example thesis statements provided for you in this handout are good examples of well-written thesis statements.

Things a writer should do when composing a thesis statement:

Your thesis should indicate your original point, idea, or argument.

A thesis should be one or two quality sentences.

Write a thesis that is specific, not general.

Clarity for the reader should be important when writing a thesis statement.

Your thesis should include your position on the topic.

Write a thesis statement that is original.

Finally, you should realize that your initial thesis statement is subject to change! The more research you do and the more you revise your paper, the more you will mold a thesis statement that will succinctly describe what your final draft proposes to argue.

Works Cited