

Writing a Strong Thesis Statement

Every good essay requires a strong thesis statement that is specific and clear. Consider these steps to help you to develop and refine your thesis statement for maximum impact and effectiveness.

What is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement is one or two sentences that focuses your ideas for your essay, tells your reader what the paper is about, and helps guide your writing to keep your argument focused. The sentence that captures your position on this main idea is your **thesis statement** as it will present the topic of your paper and also make a comment about your position in relation to the topic.

Identify the Essay Purpose

Clearly identify the purpose and scope of your essay. This will be outlined in the assignment and will be indicated by the areas you are currently studying. This may be: analysis, comparison, evaluation, argumentation, interpretation, reflection, or narrative.

Where is your Thesis Statement?

Your thesis appears early in your essay – in the introduction, or in longer essays in the second paragraph – to establish your position and give your reader a sense of direction.

Is your Thesis Statement Specific?

In order to write a successful thesis statement be as clear and as specific as possible; avoid vague words. You will continue to refine your thesis as you revise your argument(s), so your thesis will evolve and gain definition as you obtain a better sense of where your argument is taking you. Settle on one single focus and then proceed with further development.

Is your Thesis Statement too General?

Your thesis should be limited to what can be accomplished in the specified number of pages. Shape your topic so that you can get straight to the "meat" of it. Being specific in your paper will be much more successful than writing about general things that do not say much. The opposite of a focused, narrow, crisp thesis is a broad, sprawling, superficial thesis that tries to address a broad topic area.

Is your Thesis Statement Clear Enough?

Your thesis statement needs to be as clear as possible so that your reader understands exactly what you mean. Unless you're writing a technical report, avoid technical language. Avoid vague words ("interesting," "negative," "exciting," "unusual," and "difficult") and abstract words ("society," "values," or "culture"). If you do not carefully explain what you mean by them they carry little information. Never assume that the meaning of a sentence is obvious. Check to see if you need to define your terms ("socialism," "conventional," "commercialism," "society"), and then decide on the most appropriate place to do so. Do not assume, for example, that you have the same understanding of what "society" means as your reader.

Does your Thesis Comment about your Position?

The thesis statement must reveal what position you will take in relation to your topic, how you plan to analyze/evaluate the subject or the issue. Instead of merely stating a general fact or resorting to a simplistic pro/con statement, you must decide what it is you have to say and communicate this.

Refining your Thesis Statement

Do not expect to come up with a fully formulated thesis statement before you have finished writing the paper. The thesis will inevitably change as you revise and develop your ideas – and that is just fine! Start with a specific, clear thesis and be prepared to revise as your paper develops.

Adapted from: <http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/thesis/>

