

Thesis Statements



A thesis statement is the main idea or argument in a paper. Thesis statements provide writers with a focus for their paper, and they provide readers with a sense of direction.

“An excellent **thesis statement** should be “**arguable, clear, assertive, specific, narrow, and slightly ‘risky.’**”¹

Your Thesis Statement Should:

- Answer a question, propose a solution to a problem, or take a position in a debate.
- Be complex enough to develop throughout an entire essay. If your thesis is too vague, then it needs revising.
- NOT** be obvious! If you cannot come up with arguments that oppose your argument, consider revising the thesis.
- Be supported by evidence. If there is no evidence of what you claim, then it is a poor thesis.
- Be interesting; It should catch your audience’s attention.

Tips for Supporting a Thesis Statement:

1. **Write your thesis first** It is okay to free-write during the brainstorming stage of writing without a thesis statement, but it is very helpful to have a thesis while working on the first draft of a paper!
2. **Outline** Before you begin writing your first draft, develop an outline that supports your thesis statement.
3. **Be flexible** Use your thesis statement as a general guideline when writing your paper. When you have completed your first draft, go back to your thesis statement and make any necessary adjustments.
4. **Reverse Outlining** One great way to make sure you fully develop your thesis statement is to make a reverse outline when you finish your first draft. This means taking your thesis statement, main ideas, and topic sentences out and pasting them into another document. If you can use these as an outline (or table of contents) for your paper, then no revision is needed.

As a final step, address what your reader understands about your topic. Think of what they might know before and after reading your essay. If their understanding of your topic changes, then try to explain what they *will* learn instead of what they already know.

¹ Amanda Hiner, “The Characteristics of a Good Literary Thesis Statement,” (Winthrop University, 2019), 1.