

What Is a Thesis Statement?

If you have written a paragraph, you are probably familiar with the concept of a topic sentence, usually the first sentence in your paragraph that introduces your topic or main idea. A thesis statement is similar to a topic sentence. A topic sentence usually begins a paragraph and tells readers what to expect from it, and a thesis statement does the same for an entire essay. You can think of a thesis statement as a mega-topic sentence. Often, it can act as a one-sentence summary of your essay. It's your essay's mission statement.

English handbooks usually define a thesis statement as

- a statement of purpose, intent, or main idea of an essay

Think of the thesis statement as a compass. Like a compass, it gives direction and points the way:

- **For your readers**, the thesis statement keeps their brains on track, moving their thoughts towards your point. It establishes boundaries. If an essay traveled outside the bounds of its thesis statement, your reader might become confused. Confused readers stop reading.
- **For you as the writer**, the thesis statement also helps keep the essay on track. Writing choices abound. Should you include this fact, that detail, or another story? A well-formulated thesis statement outlining your essay's purpose will help you decide what to include and what to leave out. For research papers, it can also help you manage your time. You might decide to skim a book or website rather than read it thoroughly if it falls on the outskirts of your thesis.

Kinds of Thesis Statements

Expository, Narrative, & Persuasive

Most essays contain a thesis statement to give form and scope and state the author's point—why he or she took the time to write the essay in the first place. In an *expository* essay, which explains or informs, the thesis statement will narrow the focus of the explanation, such as how to choose a family pet, or the information, such as methods used to design and construct Hoover Dam. In a *narrative* essay, which is a story with a purpose, the thesis statement will reveal a lesson that the author learned or an emotion that he wants to share or relive. In a *persuasive* essay, which tries to change the reader's mind, the thesis statement will present the claim or argument the author wants to convince you to adopt. In an essay, the thesis statement glues thoughts together.

Working Thesis Statements

Let's say you have settled on a topic for your essay and you write a thesis statement. However, it has issues. It's dull, boring, and lifeless. No problem. Just call it a *working thesis statement* and you'll be fine. A working thesis statement is a preliminary statement of purpose that can keep your thoughts organized and your essay on track. If you change directions, just change your thesis. At the end of your writing, revisit it and see if you can breathe some life into it as you polish it up.

Occasionally, my students tell me they don't want to feel confined by a thesis statement. Rather, they want to begin their essay and see where it leads. This idea has some merit. Sometimes my writing takes on a life of its own, and what I end up with bears no resemblance to what I originally intended to convey. On the other hand, writing is thinking. You must use your brain at some point. You can use it before you begin writing, during your writing, or after you are finished during the editing step. If you wait until your rough draft is complete to develop a thesis statement, you might find it hard to locate a controlling or unifying idea, and you might have to discard some of your work. Giving thought to your thesis before you begin to write might actually save you time.

Academic Thesis Statements

If you write for people in the academic world, especially history or science teachers, you might need to write a three-pronged thesis statement to introduce the three main points of your paper. This gives focus for a busy teacher who may have a stack of papers to read. Additionally, an *academic thesis* makes a great working thesis because it clarifies your thoughts and forces you to constantly ask yourself whether or not you should include a particular detail in your essay. The academic thesis statement does the following:

- announces the essay's topics or arguments.
- usually occurs at the end of the introductory paragraph.
- completes the unspoken statement, "In this essay, I will [inform, describe, argue, or defend] this topic in these three ways."
- echoes the topics of the three main body paragraphs.



A thesis statement is like a big beach umbrella covering your essay and helping you to make choices about what information to include and what to pass by. Ask yourself, "Does this topic add something to my essay? Does it fit under the umbrella of my thesis statement?" If so, include it. If not, leave it, or change your thesis statement.

Developing Thesis Statements

In my experience, developing a thesis statement is one of the highest hurdles students need to hop over to write elegant essays. To help, I impose a few artificial rules on my beginning and intermediate students. First, the thesis may not be longer than one sentence. Although a thesis statement might span several sentences under the direction of an accomplished writer, beginners will focus better if they have fewer options. Second, the thesis must be the last sentence in the introduction. When students move on to more advanced essay structures, the thesis can move, too and discard these artificial rules.



Steps to create a thesis statement

To generate a thesis statement, follow these three steps:

1. Determine your essay's intent. Will it inform, describe, or persuade?
2. Narrow your focus or your topic. Instead of writing about Scotland, you might choose a specific aspect of Scotland—famous castles or the origin of golf, for example. Make sure you can explain your topic in the time and space allotted to you. A one-page paper requires a very narrow topic, while ten pages would let you broaden it.
3. Develop a two-part statement. In part one, state your narrow focus. In part two, add details concerning what you want to say about it.

Some examples follow.

Types of Thesis Statements

	Expository or Informative Essay	Narrative or Descriptive Essay	Persuasive Essay
Definition	Gives information on a particular topic.	Describes a person, place, idea, or event. Tells a story with a purpose.	Reasons and argues to change a reader's viewpoint or perspective.
Essay Types	Most biographies, reports, directions and instructions, analysis, and other essays that offer some or little interpretation.	Travelogues, personal narratives, some biographies, nostalgia, and writing that appeals to the five senses.	Any essay that makes an assertion and calls for the reader to agree or disagree with the writer's conclusion. Some literary analysis essays.
Purpose of Thesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announces the essay's subject • States the topic(s) • Completes the unspoken statement, "What I want to say is that..." or "This essay will tell you about..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the mood or emotion the writer wishes to impart • Expresses a feeling • Completes the unspoken statement, "This essay will make you feel or experience..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States the position you want to defend, what you believe, or what you want to explore • Takes a stand • Completes the unspoken statement, "This essay will explore or make you believe or persuade you to..."
Thesis Example	Men and women who wish to protect their country's freedoms can choose to serve in five different branches of the military.	As the movie ended, I thought about my grandfather's sacrifice on Iwo Jima and how his courage allowed me to live in freedom.	Women have no business endangering their country's security by serving alongside men on battlefields. or If women excel in civilian jobs, they can undoubtedly make positive contributions to the military.

More Thesis Statement Examples

Intent	Topic	Focus/Slant/Details	Thesis Example
Inform	Golf	Began in Scotland	The game of golf originated in Scotland.
Inform	Paul's third journey	Spread Christianity	Paul spread Christianity to thousands on his third missionary journey.
Describe	Me on September 11th	Fear	As I watched events unfold on that fateful Tuesday, I shuddered to think perhaps they foretold the beginning of WWII.
Describe	Contestants	Anticipation	The girls eagerly huddled around the announcer and waited for the judges' decision.
Persuade	Television	Beneficial	TV's educational programs expand a child's experience.
Persuade	Sports	Steroids	Steroid use destroys the competitive spirit of professional sports.

Working or Academic Thesis Statement Examples

Intent	Subject	Three Topics	Thesis Example
Inform	History of golf	In Scotland In England In the United States	The game of golf originated in Scotland, moved to England, but hit its swing in the United States.
Inform	Sports	Baseball Football Hockey	America's favorite sports include baseball, football, and hockey.
Describe	Hawaiian vacation	Refreshment Economy Culture	Stressed-out people journey to Hawaii to refresh their spirits, support the economy, and experience a different culture.
Persuade	Daytime curfews	Freedom Taxes Ineffective	Daytime curfews infringe on the freedom of minors, waste taxpayers' money, and prove ineffective.
Persuade	Television	Obesity Inappropriate Content Solitude	Unmonitored television viewing harms children physically, mentally, and socially.



Notes



Use this page to take notes as your teacher directs.

Purpose of a Thesis Statement (Function)

Kinds of Theses by Essay Type (Genre)

1. Narrative (descriptive)
2. Expository (Informative)
3. Persuasive (argumentative)

Working Thesis Statements

Academic Thesis Statements

Steps to Create Thesis Statements

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Thesis Modeling Notes

Essay Type	Topic	Focus/Slant/Details	Possible Thesis
Expository (Informative)	Friends	Loving the unlovable	
		Overcoming shyness	
		Bible verses	
Narrative (Descriptive)	Holidays	Nostalgic	
		Time for family	
		Stressful/hectic	
Persuasive	Television	Harmful	
		Wasteful	
		Enjoyable	
Academic/ Informative	Career	Fulfilling Secure Profitable	
Academic/ Persuasive	Smoking	Health Cost Image	

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise I: Thesis Statements

Thesis Statements

Directions: For each of the subjects below, choose an essay type, decide on a slant or details, and write a thesis statement. You must use each of the essay types (to describe, inform, or persuade) at least once and one example of a three-pronged academic thesis.

1. Courage

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus / Slant / Details _____

Thesis

2. A gift

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus / Slant / Details _____

Thesis

3. Women in the military

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus / Slant / Details _____

Thesis

4. Education

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus / Slant / Details _____

Thesis

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Exercise 2: Thesis Statements

Thesis Statements

Directions: For each of the subjects below, choose an essay type, decide on a slant or details, and write a thesis statement. You must use each of the essay types (to describe, inform, or persuade) at least once and one example of a three-pronged academic thesis.

1. Socialism

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus/Slant/Details _____

Thesis

2. A favorite teacher

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus/Slant/Details _____

Thesis

3. College

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus/Slant/Details _____

Thesis

4. Ministry or community service

Circle essay type: describe, inform, or persuade

Focus/Slant/Details _____

Thesis
