

THE THESIS STATEMENT

A strong thesis statement articulates the unifying theme of an academic paper. It may present an argument or opinion, describe an idea, or provoke an analysis. Different disciplines and types of essays require varied forms of thesis statements. Reading example essays can provide a sense of what is expected in a specific paper.

Creating the thesis statement

- In point form write the topic and main ideas of your paper
- Freewrite the most important conclusion or thought you have about your paper
- Try to make connections between the points and highlight implications, causes or applications; answer the question: "Why did you write this essay?"
- Combine the above ideas into one or a few sentences

Why the thesis statement is so important

A primary goal of academic writing is the communication of ideas to contribute to a growing body of knowledge. Because a thesis statement clearly defines what the essay is about, it guides the reader through the expression of ideas in order to help make sense of what the writer is saying (Waddell, 2004; Writing Tutorial Services, 2004). Without the thesis statement, it is likely that the writer will meander through disconnected thoughts and will lose the reader. The more precise the thesis statement is, the more likely the writing that supports it will be clear and organized. Sometimes the thesis statement needs to be rewritten as the essay evolves, as the original ideas have changed (Karper, 2002; Waddell).

Example Thesis Statements

Research paper topic: How to write an academic paper (description)

Thesis statement	Stronger Thesis Statement
There are many things a writer needs to know to write a good university paper. This paper will discuss the writing process and research tips as being key to producing a good essay.	An academic paper requires organization, adequate research or attention to subject matter, and expression in conventional English; however, without the author's deep understanding of the topic, the essay falls flat.

The first example tells what the paper will be about in general terms; we know that the writer will discuss the writing process and research tips. However, the word choice is weak. The use of specific words would better set a tone and focus the essay.

The second, stronger example specifically states the requirements for writing a paper, and attaches importance to one particular requirement, thus focusing the reader on what the author feels is essential.

For an **argumentative paper**, you will be making a claim for specific reasons that are supported with your evidence. Thus, writing the claim and its reasons can form the thesis statement. The paper will subsequently provide the evidence for the reasons (Booth, Colomb & Williams, 2003; Karper, 2002).

Research paper topic: The importance of art to society (argument)

Thesis statement	Stronger Thesis Statement
Art is important to society in many ways, and I will talk about them in this essay. The controversial artist Mapplethorpe will be my focus. (Babington & LePan, 1991, p. 19).	The homoerotic art of Robert Mapplethorpe deserves to be exhibited at public expense even though most people find it offensive.

The first example states the thesis in general terms and introduces the reader to the idea of Mapplethorpe as a controversial artist.

The second actually presents an argument, a point of view that can be agreed or disagreed with. It does not, however, offer reasons, which weakens the thesis statement. If "The homoerotic art of Robert Mapplethorpe functions as **political and social commentary**, and deserves to be exhibited at public expense in order **to expose the general public to lifestyles that are as acceptable, although not as accepted, as their own**" were used, the thesis statement would be even stronger.



Research paper topic: The relationship between policy and research (argument)

Thesis statement	Stronger Thesis Statement
This essay will explain why provincial policy when making monetary allocations should widen its information base to include various research studies.	Provincial economic policy must be informed by not only public opinion and fiscal responsibility, but also research funded outside of corporate interest. Without careful consideration of environmental impacts, short-term economic gain becomes long-term fiasco.

The first statement offers a general idea of what the essay will address.

The second specifically states three areas that the author identifies as important to developing policy (**public opinion, fiscal responsibility, research**) but highlights the need to include research of a specific type (non-corporate-based and focusing on environmental impacts) to avoid fiasco. Fiasco could have been defined to focus the thesis statement further, but the second statement is already more precise and interesting.

References/Resources

Babington D. & LePan, D. (1991). *The Broadview guide to writing*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press Ltd.

Booth W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2003). *The craft of research*. (2nd ed.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Karper, E. (2002). *Writing a thesis statement*. Retrieved March 23, 2004 from http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/general/gl_thesis.html

Waddell, C. *Thesis writing*. Retrieved March 23, 2004 from <http://www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter/thesis.html>

Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University. *How to write a thesis statement*. Retrieved March 23, 2004 from <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/thesis.html>

Additional Resources

Purdue University's OWL handout (see Karper under references) provides five links that offer more information and practice on writing thesis statements.

