

# How Do I Write a Thesis Statement?

## What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement is a very specific argument that guides your paper. Generally, a thesis statement consists of **two parts**:

1. a clearly identifiable **topic or subject matter**, and
2. a succinct summary of **what you have to say** about that topic

**A thesis functions like the case a lawyer has to make** to the judge and jury in a courtroom. An effective thesis statement explains to your reader the case you are going to make and how you are going to make it. Your thesis also helps to keep you focused as writer and determine what information you do (or don't) need to include in your analysis.

Traditionally, the thesis statement is found **near the end of your introduction**, though this may change depending on the assignment. Don't be afraid to draft a thesis statement that is more than one sentence.

**Note also:** You do not need a perfect thesis statement before you draft the rest of the paper. In fact, **you will likely need to modify your thesis** once you have a complete draft to make sure that your paper does what your thesis says it will. Honing and tweaking a thesis statement during the revision process is ultimately more important than having it exact and precise during the drafting process

## Characteristics of a WEAK thesis statement:

Vague: Raises an interesting topic or question but doesn't specify an argument  
 Offers plot summary, statement of fact, or obvious truths instead of an argument  
 Offers opinion or conjecture rather than an argument (cannot be proven with textual evidence)  
 Is too broad or too complex for the length of the paper  
 Uses meaningful-sounding words but doesn't say anything

Disclaimer: This is not a complete list! You can probably think of many more characteristics of a weak thesis statement.

## Characteristics of a STRONG thesis statement:

Answers a specific question  
 Takes a distinct position on the topic  
 Is debatable (a reasonable person could argue an alternative position)  
 Appropriately focused for the page length of the assignment  
 Allows your reader to anticipate the organization of your argument

If you're having trouble drafting a thesis, try filling in the blanks:

In this paper, I argue that \_\_\_\_\_, because/by \_\_\_\_\_.  
 While critics argue \_\_\_\_\_, I argue \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.  
 By looking at \_\_\_\_\_, I argue that \_\_\_\_\_, which is important because \_\_\_\_\_.  
 The text, \_\_\_\_\_, defines \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_, in order to argue \_\_\_\_\_.

Disclaimer: These are only models. They'll be useful to help you to get started, but you'll have to do quite a bit of tweaking before your thesis is ready for your paper.

## THESIS statement checklist!

*Ask yourself the following questions  
as you work your way through the writing process:*

❑ **Does my thesis address a debatable topic?**

Almost every paper assignment requires you to make an argument. In order to do this, you must first have a topic about which one could reasonably make at least two different arguments. If it isn't debatable, why spend the time to write about it?

❑ **Does my thesis make a specific claim on a topic?**

The thesis statement is the central claim of your paper, so it must be a complete sentence that explains the argument or purpose of your paper. It is *not* a general topic or question; rather, it takes a stand on the topic at hand

❑ **Does my thesis offer a roadmap for the reader, containing organizational cues as to how to arrange the various parts of my argument in the pages that follow?**

Your thesis should not only state your argument but offer a roadmap for your readers, as to how the paper as a whole will proceed. This will often require one or two sentences beyond the single sentence that states your thesis.

❑ **Does my thesis contain the key words or central idea that focuses my argument?**

Including the key words of your analysis in your thesis statement allows your reader to better understand the important points of your argument in the following paragraphs. Defining your key words also helps to keep you focused on your argument as you write the body of your paper.

❑ **Is my thesis focused enough or complex enough to satisfy the page length of the assignment?**

Remember: Part of your task in writing a paper is not only to state what you will argue, but also to make the argument itself. If you cannot complete the argument in the space required, then you must narrow the scope of your topic. Similarly, if your thesis is too narrow, you will have to brainstorm ways to broaden your argument.

❑ **Can I support my thesis with the material available?**

If you cannot support your claim, then you cannot make an argument. If your thesis cannot be supported with the material available in your text/s, you will have to reframe your argument in provable terms.

❑ **Does my thesis really reflect my final argument?**

If your thesis statement does not accurately express your claim, your readers will be confused. The tricky part is that often in the course of writing a paper, our ideas change or we modify our opinions on the topic. This means that it is vitally important to continuously check that your thesis statement is the most accurate expression of your argument possible. *When you're finished with a draft, revise your thesis so that it reflects what you're really saying, or revise the rest of the paper so that it proves your thesis.*