

Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement is a sentence that tells the reader exactly what you will be covering in the paper. The thesis statement presents the main topic while also providing the reader with exact order in which the topics/ideas will be presented.

A thesis statement should include the essay's subject and purpose while informing the reader of your focus. A thesis statement should use *specific* language while giving the reader an idea of the order in which topics will be discussed. It should cover **ONLY** material discussed in your paper while covering **ALL** of material in your paper.

Think of your thesis statement as the map of your paper. By looking at this statement, your reader should be able to discern what he/she will read in the document.

Depending on the purpose of the paper, a thesis statement may take several forms.

1. For an argumentative/persuasive paper, your thesis statement should state your main claim, which should be debatable. It should also provide your reader with the reasons and evidence that support your claim, in the order you plan to discuss them in your paper.
2. For an informative/expository paper, your thesis states the specific topic you plan on discussing in the exact order that it will appear within your paper.



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Nine Errors to Avoid When Composing a Thesis

1. A thesis cannot be a fragment; it must express a complete thought.

Unacceptable: how students learn to write

Acceptable: The best means for teaching students to write is to have them focus on the steps of the writing process rather than the end product.

2. A thesis must not be worded as a question. (Sometimes the answer to the question can be the thesis.)

Unacceptable: Do Americans really need large refrigerators?

Acceptable: If Americans did their marketing daily, as do some Europeans, they could save energy and money because they could use smaller refrigerators.

3. A thesis must not be too broad.

Unacceptable: The literature of mythology contains many journeys.

Acceptable: In Greek mythology, the motif of the journey represents the internal struggles and eventual perseverance of mortals.

4. A thesis should not contain unrelated elements.

Unacceptable: All novelists seek the truth, and some novelists are good psychologists.

Acceptable: In their attempt to probe human nature, many novelists strive to reveal the intricacies of human relations.

5. A thesis should not contain phrases like “I think” or “in my opinion” because they weaken the writer’s argument.

Unacceptable: In my opinion, all cigarette smoking in public places should be banned because of the adverse effects of “passive smoking” on non-smokers.

Acceptable: All cigarette smoking in public places should be banned because of the adverse effects of “passive smoking” on non-smokers.

6. A thesis should not be expressed in vague language.

Unacceptable: Religion as part of the school curriculum should be avoided because it can cause trouble.

Acceptable: Religion should not be part of the public school curriculum because it is a highly personal commitment and can cause conflict with those who hold alternative beliefs.

7. A thesis must not be expressed in muddled or incoherent language.

Unacceptable: Homosexuality is a “status” offence to the effect that the participants are willing so that the relationship is voluntary in character rather than the type described in a “victim-perpetrator” model.

Acceptable: Homosexuality between two consenting adults should be considered as alternate life style rather than a crime.

8. A thesis should not be expressed in figurative language (symbolic in any way).

Unacceptable: The amazons of today are trying to purge all the stag words from the English language.

Acceptable: Today’s feminists are trying to eliminate the use of sexually-biased words from public use.

9. A thesis should not simply state a fact.

Unacceptable: Women have been repressed at different times and in different cultures.

Acceptable: The repression of women writers in America during the nineteenth century contributed to the idea that there were relatively few writers who should be included in anthologies.