

A thesis statement is a sentence that expresses the main ideas of your paper and answers the question(s) posed by your paper. It offers your readers a quick and easy way to see what the paper will be discussing and what you as a writer are setting out to tell them.

General Thesis Statement Tips

- A thesis statement generally consists of two parts: your topic, and then the analysis, explanation(s), or assertion(s) that you are making about the topic.
- In some kinds of writing, such as narratives or descriptions, a thesis statement is less important, but you must still provide some kind of statement in your first paragraph that helps to guide your reader through your paper.
- A thesis statement is a very **specific** statement -- it should cover only what you want to discuss in your paper and be supported with specific evidence.
- Generally, a thesis statement is the last sentence at the end of the first paragraph of an essay. This allows readers a clear idea of what to expect as they read.
- As you write and revise your paper, it is okay to change your thesis statement -- sometimes you do not discover what you really want to say about a topic until you've started (or finished) writing! Just make sure that your "final" thesis statement accurately shows what will happen in your paper.

Sample Thesis Statements

Because a thesis must prepare readers for facts and details, it cannot itself be a fact. It must always be a generalization demanding proof or further development.

Too Factual The first polygraph was developed by Dr. John A. Larson in 1921.

Revised Because the polygraph has not been proved reliable, even under the most controlled conditions, its use by private employers should be banned.

Although a thesis must be a generalization, it must not be *too* general. You will need to narrow the focus of any thesis that you cannot adequately develop in the space allowed. Unless you were writing a book or a very long research paper, the following thesis would be too broad.

Too Broad Many drugs are now being used successfully to treat mental illnesses.

Revised Despite its risks and side effects, lithium is an effective treatment for depression.

A thesis should be sharply focused and not too vague. Beware of any thesis containing a fuzzy, hard-to-define word such as *interesting*, *good*, or *disgusting*.

Too Vague Many of the songs played on station WXQP are disgusting.

Revised Of the songs played on WXQP, all too many depict sex crudely, sanction the beating or rape of women, or foster gang violence.

Information taken from:

Hacker, Diana. A Writer's Reference. 3rd ed. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

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<<http://www.owl.english.purdue.edu/>>