

THESIS STATEMENTS

The thesis is the backbone of the paper; it is the determining factor for the success of the paper. A thesis is the main point of your paper. Everything else in your paper should contribute to explaining and proving the main point. Your thesis may be a single sentence, but it can be longer. In a large paper, you might need a paragraph or more to state your thesis. A thesis is more specific than either a subject area or a topic. Examples of topics and subjects are listed below.

Subject	Topics
1. Homelessness.....	The societal impact of homelessness
2. Marijuana.....	The effects of marijuana.
3. Computers.....	Computers in society.

None of the above are thesis statements. They are either general subjects or topics.

Here is a checklist for the development of a good thesis statement:

Basic requirements for a thesis statement	
	It states the essay's subject - the topic that you are discussing.
	It reflects the essay's purpose - either to give your readers information or to persuade your readers to agree with you.
	It includes a focus - your assertion that conveys your point of view.
	It uses specific language - vague words are avoided.
	It may briefly state the major subdivisions of the essay's topic.

There are many facets of a thesis statement. Therefore, there is no set standard. Your teacher may want your thesis statement at the beginning of the introductory paragraph. Other teachers may want it as the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. Your thesis may consist of just one sentence, but it can be more.

Here are a few examples:

NOTE: Be sure you do not confuse the title with the thesis statement. The thesis statement is the backbone of your paper. Without a proper thesis statement, you will be unsuccessful in the construction and development of your paper.

Topic: **Classical Music**

Bad Example: Classical music combines many different sounds.

Knowing what you know now, and using the basic checklist, what's wrong with that thesis statement?

It lacks specific language and does not use major subdivisions.

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Correct Example: **Classical music can be played by groups of various sizes, ranging from chamber ensembles to full symphony orchestras.**

Topic: **Women Artists**

Bad Example: The paintings of women are getting more attention.

What does this lack, preventing it from making a good thesis statement?

If you use that thesis statement, you will be talking about *all* women artists, ever, who may, or may not, have received more attention.

Correct example: **During the past ten years, the works of artist Mary Cassatt and Rosa Bonheur have finally gained widespread critical acclaim.**

Now that you have seen the corrected example, can you tell us what is lacking in the thesis statement?

1. It lacks information.
2. It does not use specific language.
3. It does not use major subdivisions.

Use the pattern below to create an infallible thesis statement.

Fool Proof Thesis: *****

1. **What is your subject?**
2. **What is your opinion on the subject?**
3. **Give the reasons for your opinions.**

Subject matter, General introspection, "because" reasons

Alcohol is dangerous when driving because it impairs the driver's vision, coordination, and reflex.
Subject Opinion (introspection) Reasons

We are asking the question, "Why is alcohol dangerous when driving?"

IMPORTANT:

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Many times writers "discover" their real thesis near the end of their first draft. That's fine. Consider the draft a prewriting or focusing exercise and begin another draft using the newly discovered thesis as a starting point.

AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS IN THESIS STATEMENTS

Five mistakes to avoid when forming your thesis statements:

1. Don't make your thesis merely an announcement of your subject matter or a description of your intentions. State an attitude toward the subject.

Poor- The subject of this theme is my experience with a pet boa constrictor.
(This is an announcement of the subject, not a thesis.)

Poor- I'm going to discuss boa constrictors as pets.
(This represents a statement of intention, but not a thesis.)

Better- Boa constrictors do not make healthy indoor pets.
(The writer states an opinion that will be explained and defended in the essay.)

Better- My pet boa constrictor, Sir Pent, was a much better bodyguard than my dog, Fang.
(The writer states an opinion that will be explained and illustrated in the essay.)

2. Don't clutter your thesis with expressions such as "in my opinion," "I believe," and "in this essay I'll argue that..." These unnecessary phrases weaken your thesis statement because they often make you sound timid or uncertain. This is your essay; therefore, the opinions expressed are obviously yours. Be forceful; speak directly, with conviction.

Poor- My opinion is that the federal government should devote more money to solar energy research.

Poor- My thesis states that the federal government should devote more money to solar energy research.

Better The federal government should devote more money to solar energy research.

Poor- In this essay I will give you lots of reasons why horse racing should not be legalized in Texas.

Better- Horse racing should not be legalized in Texas.

3. Don't be unreasonable. Making irrational or oversimplified claims will not persuade your reader that you have a thorough understanding of the issue. Don't insult any reader; avoid irresponsible charges, name calling, and profanity.

Poor- Radical religious fanatics across the nation are trying to impose their right-wing views by censoring high school library books.
(Words such as "radical," "fanatics," "right-wing," and "censoring" will antagonize many readers immediately.)

Better- Only local school board members - not religious leaders or parents- should decide which books high school libraries should order.

Poor- Too many corrupt books in our high school libraries selected by liberal or atheistic educators are undermining the morals of our youth.
(Again, some readers will be offended.)

Better- In order to ensure that high school libraries contain books that reflect community standards, parents should have a voice in selecting new titles.

4. Don't merely state a fact. A thesis is an assertion of opinion that leads to discussion. Don't select an idea that is self-evident or dead-ended.

Poor- Child abuse is a terrible problem in our country.
(Yes, of course; who wouldn't agree that child abuse is terrible?)

Better- Child-abuse laws in this state are too lenient for repeat offenders.
(This thesis will lead to a discussion in which supporting arguments and evidence will be presented.)

Poor- Advertisers often use sex in their ads to sell products.
(True. But how could this essay be turned into something more than a description of one ad after another?)

Better- A number of liquor advertisers, well known for using pictures of sexy models to sell their products, are now using special graphics to send subliminal sexual messages to their readers.
(This claim is controversial and will require persuasive supporting evidence.)

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Better- Although long criticized for their sexist portrayal of women in television commercials, the auto industry is just as often guilty of stereotyping men as brainless idiots unable to make a decision.

(This thesis makes a point that may lead to an interesting discussion.)

5. Don't express your thesis in the form of a question, unless the answer is already obvious to the reader.

Poor- Why should every college student have to take two years of foreign language?

Better- Math majors should be exempt from the foreign language requirement.

PRACTICING WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

A. Identify each of the following thesis statements as adequate (A) or inadequate (I).
If the thesis is weak or insufficient in some way, explain the problem.

1. I think *Star Wars* was the most interesting movie of its decade.
2. Which car is a better value, the Chevy or the Ford?
3. Some people think that college entrance examinations are biased against women and minorities.
4. My essay will tell you how to apply for a college loan with the least amount of trouble.
5. During the fall term, final examinations should be given before the Christmas break, not after the holidays as they are now.
6. Raising the cost of tuition will be a terrible burden on the students and won't do anything to help the quality of education at this school.
7. Bicycle riding is my favorite exercise because it's so good for my body.
8. Defeat of this year's nuclear test-ban treaty will lead to the world's ultimate destruction.
9. Persons over 75 should be required to renew their driver's licenses every year.
10. Having a close friend you can talk to is very important.

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B. Rewrite the sentences below so that each one is a clear thesis statement. Be prepared to explain why you changed the sentences as you did.

1. Applying for a job can be a negative experience.
2. Skiing is a lot of fun, but it can be expensive and dangerous.
3. There are many advantages and disadvantages to the country's new voting machines.
4. The deregulation of the telephone system has been one big headache.
5. In this paper I will debate the pros and cons of the controversial motorcycle helmet law.
6. We need to do something about the billboard clutter on the main highway into town.
7. The gun-control laws in this country need to be rewritten.
8. Prayer in the schools is a hot issue today.
9. In my opinion, Santa Barbara is a fantastic vacation spot.
10. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s had a tremendous effect on this country.

SEE THESIS STATEMENT CHART ON NEXT PAGE!

THESIS STATEMENT CHART

PROBLEM	SOLUTION
<p>1. Confusing a title with a thesis statement:</p> <p>Destruction of Rain Forests</p>	<p>Make a statement about the subject in sentence, not fragment, form:</p> <p>The destruction of the rain forests leads to <i>three harmful effects</i>.</p>
<p>2. Announcing the subject.</p> <p>I am going to discuss the characteristics of rain forests.</p>	<p>Do not tell what you are going to discuss; just discuss it:</p> <p>Rain forests have at least <i>three important characteristics</i>.</p>
<p>3. Making a factual statement.</p> <p>The canopy level in a rain forest prevents 97 percent of the sun from reaching the forest floor.</p>	<p>Make a statement that needs support or suggests development:</p> <p>Scientists have divided rain forests into <i>four different levels</i>.</p>
<p>4. Choosing a subject that is too broad.</p> <p>Rain forests are important to humanity.</p>	<p>Limit the thesis to one that can be covered in an essay.</p> <p>Destruction of rain forests has a <i>few major consequences</i>.</p>
<p>5. Choosing a subject that has several main aspects:</p> <p>Studying about rain forests involves three aspects: characteristics, contributions, effects.</p>	<p>Limit the thesis to one main aspect – a long research paper could discuss all three aspects:</p> <p>Studies show that rain forests make <i>several major contributions</i>.</p>
<p>6. Choosing a subject that is vague and general:</p> <p>Cutting down rain forests is causing a problem.</p>	<p>Choose a specific aspect of the subject to develop.</p> <p>Cutting down rain forests has <i>some harmful effects on the earth</i>.</p>

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