

Thesis Development

The thesis sentence is the main assertion of an essay. Your thesis should tell your reader the main point or idea of your paper. A good thesis will be clearly identifiable within the paper and will be narrow, purposeful, and specific. A thesis statement must ALWAYS be a complete sentence. In some cases, the thesis may stretch to two sentences, but it should be identified in a concise statement, not generally discussed within a paragraph.

Thesis statements may vary depending on the type of paper. In an argumentative essay, the thesis statement should clearly state your opinion or view on the issue. In a compare and contrast essay, the thesis statement should reveal how the two objects in question are alike and different. The organization or type of essay will impact how the thesis sentence is constructed. This helps to reflect the purpose of the paper. In some cases, your thesis will serve as a roadmap and can even guide both you and your reader through the rest of the essay by introducing the main points and how they tie together to make the main idea.

A good thesis should be interesting and maybe even controversial. It should draw readers into the paper and leave them eager to learn more.

Bad - Insignificant and Non-Debatable:

Trees make the park prettier.

This is not a good thesis statement. It is too general. Most people would agree, leaving no reason for debate. It is not interesting or thought provoking. Why should anyone read this paper?

Good - Interesting and Controversial:

The city power company should pursue other options instead of cutting down the two hundred year old trees in Sunnyside Park.

This sentence is much better. It is thought provoking and implies that the paper will provide relevant information about both sides of the argument.

Try to make your thesis statement spark your readers' interest, but always remember that it should match the overall content of your paper. Each part of your paper should tie back to your thesis in some way. If your thesis does not make a statement of purpose or reveal your point, then it is too general. Try to make your thesis statement as specific as possible, but remember that you will have to support it with main points and details as the essay progresses.

A thesis sentence is not a research question. Your thesis statement should be a basic answer to your research question. It should make an assertive statement about your views or opinions.

Bad - Tentative:

Should teenagers be allowed to join the military?

It is not a good practice to use questions as thesis statements. Your readers want to know what you think. Your thesis should state a point. If you do not have a point, then you are not ready to write a paper.

Good - Assertive:

Teenagers lack the maturity to go to war and should not be allowed to enroll in active service.

This statement is better. It tells the reader exactly what the paper will argue and gives a specific reason.

Be as specific as you can with your thesis statement. Readers will often base their opinion of the paper on the thesis statement. It should convey a point specific enough to allow the reader to make a guess about what the rest of the paper will say.

Bad - General:

Many religions throughout history have had several gods.

This thesis statement is too vague. Make your thesis as specific as possible in order to give your reader a better idea of what your paper will discuss.

Good - Specific:

Advanced cultures throughout history, such as the Greek, Roman, and Aztec societies, have centered around polytheistic religions.

This sentence provides more specific information and can serve as a basic outline for your paper. Based on the thesis statement, the body paragraphs for this paper will probably develop into three main points that explore the Roman, Greek, and Aztec religions.

Thesis Placement

Generally, the thesis sentence comes at the end of the introduction. In fact, most readers (and professors) will look for it there. However, the thesis sentence may come at a different place, particularly when writing narratives.

In narrative writing, the thesis is usually at the end of the paper. The point in a narrative naturally comes at the end because the rest of the story sets up your point, the moral or lesson.

If you are having trouble coming up with a thesis, try this writing exercise:

1. Write your first draft. Keep writing until you feel that you absolutely have nothing else to say about the subject.
2. Look at the last thing you wrote. Your thesis is likely to be either the first sentence or last sentence of the conclusion.

The thesis can usually be found in the following places:

- At the last sentence of the opening paragraph
- At the end of the introduction if the introduction has multiple paragraphs
- At the start of the conclusion if the topic requires a large amount of debate or if a narrative organization is applied to the whole document

Remember to change your thesis as necessary. It should always match the rest of your paper to convey your main point. As you write, your ideas may change, especially when you do research. Writing is a form of learning, and it makes sense that your main point will change as you write more about what others think and delve into your own thoughts on your subject matter. It is okay to change your thesis to suit your new ideas and beliefs.

Sources Consulted

Ruszkiewicz, John, Daniel E. Seward, and Maxine Hairston, eds. *SF Writer*. 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008.