

The Thesis Statement

A successful, well-developed thesis statement states the point of your argument explicitly (clearly and without doubt). Think of your thesis statement as the “road map” to your paper, which sets the argumentative direction, or goal. The introduction is the starting point (with the road map), your body paragraphs will be the “stops” along the way, and the conclusion paragraph is the “final destination.” Using this “road map” helps to eliminate overwriting and inserting information that does not support or develop your thesis statement.

Located most often at the end of the introductory paragraph, the thesis statement fulfills two main objectives:

1. It states the topic of your essay (the subject/topic under discussion)
2. It conveys what you hope to prove about the topic (an informative or persuasive purpose and the focus of your argument).

❖ **A thesis statement must express a complete thought; do not create a fragment.**

→ Fragment: how students learn to write

→ Complete thought: The best means for teaching student to write is to have them focus on the steps of the writing process rather than the end product.

❖ **A thesis statement must be an answer to a question**

→ Research Question: Do Americans need large refrigerators?

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

❖ **A thesis statement must use specific language to develop the paper’s focus. Do not use vague language or unrelated elements.**

→ Vague language: All novelists seek the truth, and some novelists are good psychologists.

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

❖ **A thesis statement must be a declarative statement. Do not use phrases like “I think” or “in my opinion” that will weaken the argument. Additionally, avoid stating a fact as a thesis statement.**

→ Weak: In my opinion, women have been repressed at different times and in different cultures.

→ Stronger: The repression of women writers in America during the nineteenth century contributed to the idea that there were relatively few writers worthy enough to be included in anthologies.

❖ **A thesis statement must be expressed using coherent and concrete language. Avoid using figurative or muddled language.**

→ Muddled/Figurative language: The amazons of today are trying to purge all the stag words from the English language.

→ Concrete language: Today, many feminists are trying to eliminate the use of sexually-biased words from public use.

Types of Thesis Statements

There are two types of thesis statements: an argumentative thesis statement and an informative thesis statement. Determine your purpose for writing (to argue/to convince OR to explain/to inform) before you begin the thesis statement process.

An argumentative thesis statement will

1. State your main claim, which is debatable (or arguable)
2. The reasons/evidence that support this claim
3. The order in which you will present your support (organization)

Step 1. Choose a topic: *barn owls*

Step 2. Focus the topic: *barn owls' nests and farmers*

Step 3. Narrow the topic further by posing it as a question: *Should farmers eliminate barn owl nests?*

Step 4. Answer the question. The answer is your thesis statement:

Barn owls' nests should not be eliminated from barns [debatable issue] because barn owls help farmers by eliminating insects and rodent pests [specifically states reasons/evidence to support the claim].

What the essay will do: the essay would explain *how* and *why* owls help farmers in this way by providing sources, examples, and support throughout the body paragraphs.

Instant Thesis Generator

from Steve Posusta *Don't Panic: The Procrastinator's Guide to Writing an Effective Term Paper* (Bandanna Books, 1996)

What is this?

This is a statement of the contrary position (or positions), i.e. a statement of the proposition (or propositions) against which you are going to be arguing.

Although...

Why is it important?

Your essay should be seen as a reasoned contribution to an ongoing academic legal conversation (debate). To contribute meaningfully to that conversation, you need to demonstrate an awareness of what other people have been saying up to this point. This is an opportunity to show you have done the appropriate research into the issue you are addressing.

What is this?

This is a statement of your thesis, i.e. the proposition (or propositions) you are going to defend in the essay.

Nevertheless...

Why is it important?

If you don't have some claim or thesis that you are trying to defend, your essay will be without direction. You will end up cataloguing (describing) the views of others, and failing to critically engage with those views. Critical engagement is what you need in order to succeed in academic writing.

What is this?

This is a statement of the reasons you use to support your thesis. If you are making an empirical claim (i.e. a claim about the way the world is) you will need to appeal to some empirical study, observation, survey, experiment etc.. If you are making a normative claim (i.e. a claim about how the world ought to be), you will need to appeal to some moral or ethical principle that supports it.

Because...

Why is it important?

To contribute meaningfully to the academic conversation, you cannot simply assert your opinion. You need to do something to convince other participants that your opinion is correct or, at a minimum, that it is something they should seriously consider. This will require the presentation of reasons and evidence to back up your claim.

An informative (or expository) thesis statement will

1. state what you are going to explain
2. outline the organization of your explanation

Step 1. Choose a topic: *barn owls*

Step 2. Focus the topic: *lifestyles of barn owls*.

Step 3. Narrow the topic further by posing it as a question: *What are the lifestyles of barn owls?*

Step 4. Answer the question. The answer is your thesis statement:

The lifestyles of barn owls [introduces topic] *include hunting for insects and animals, building nests, and raising their young* [states the explanation and outlines the organization]. *

The thesis statement does NOT take a stand or make a claim that needs to be proved throughout the paper.

What the essay will do: This thesis statement establishes that the paper will provide information on the lifestyles of barn owls. Using the subdivisions in this thesis statement -

1. hunting for insects and animals;
2. building nests;
3. raising their young - the writer can create separate paragraphs for each category.

Thesis for a Literary Analysis will

1. make a claim about a work of literature
2. incorporate author's purpose (theme) and author's style (lit devices)
3. occasionally you will be asked to compare two or more pieces of literature

Step 1. Choose a topic: *symbolism*

Step 2. Connect topic to theme: *The façade of the American Dream renders it elusive*

Step 3. Narrow the topic further by posing it as a question: *How does symbolism help uncover this theme?*

Step 4. Answer the question. The answer is your thesis statement:

Fitzgerald's use of vivid and intentional symbolism [identify topic and how author uses it] *unravels the elusive American Dream by exposing its glittery and false façade*. [specifically states how it relates to theme and uses a strong authorial intent verb].

What the essay will do: This thesis statement establishes that the paper will provide reasons and connections between symbol and theme. The organizational pattern may establish a focus on the types of symbols that 'unravel':

1. Color symbolism
2. Valley of the Ashes
3. The eyes of T.J. Eckleburg
- 4.

Thesis Verbs: This is by no means a comprehensive list, just some starting suggestions!

Augments
Hints
Ascertains
Highlights
Advises
Molds
Averts
Provokes

Balances
Profiles
Bolsters
Plaits
Details
Renders
Entwines
Rallies

Extracts
Validates
Ignites
Whittles
Intones

Thesis Statement Checklist

The purpose of your thesis statement is to present the goal of the paper (argumentative direction) and forecast its content (to be covered in the body paragraphs). Once you have completed your thesis statement, ask yourself the following questions:

- ❖ What is the main point of the essay? Is it clearly stated in the thesis statement?
- ❖ What evidence supports the thesis statement?

Is your thesis statement...

- ❖ Expressed concisely in one complete sentence?
- ❖ Supported by details, facts, examples within the assigned pages (moving the reader through time and space)?

Does your thesis statement...

- ❖ Answer the essay question?
- ❖ Make an argument and present a point of view ("yes," "no," OR "okay, but")?
- ❖ Go beyond announcing your topic? (presents how/why and does not state a fact)
- ❖ Unify all ideas in your essay? (think: road map)
- ❖ Present a structure that you can follow in your essay?
- ❖ Include only the ideas you explain fully in your essay?
- ❖ Fit the evidence you use in your paper?
- ❖ Pass the "so what" test? (if your reader's first response to your thesis statement is "so what?" then you need to clarify and make a stronger connection to the topic)
- ❖ Take a position that others might challenge? (for an argumentative paper)
- ❖ Use specific language to connect to your paragraph's topic sentences? (remember the subject and treatment in your topic sentences)

Thesis Formation Exercise

****To write an effective thesis statement, start with a general idea and then sharpen your focus. With a narrowed focus, you can present concrete evidence to help support your claim. The broader your claim, the more evidence is needed to support your paper.**

Step 1: Choose your topic or find your topic from a broad subject area

Broad Subject Area: Society and Individual Rights

- a. Possible Topic #1: Home foreclosure practices
- b. Possible Topic #2: Cell-phone Bans (e.g., while driving)
- c. Possible Topic #3: Compulsory military (or alternate) service
- d. Possible Topic #4: Government “wiretapping”

Step 2: Craft a focus through a research question (to sharpen your focus)

Should cell phones be banned while driving?

Step 3: As the writer, form an opinion to set the argumentative direction for your paper

I think cell phones should be banned while driving in order to prevent any distractions on the road.

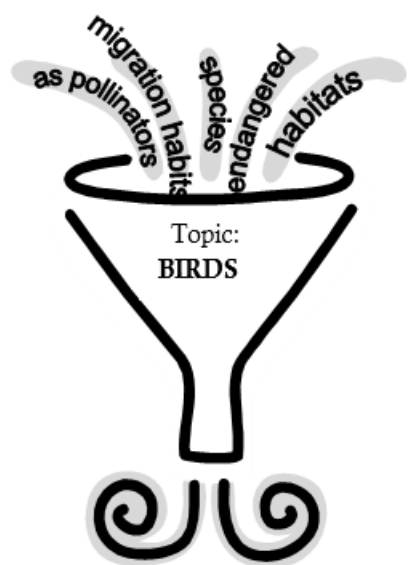
Step 4: Create a working thesis statement to organize your concrete evidence and support

In order to prevent any distractions and to keep motorists, passengers, and pedestrians safe, cell phones should be banned while driving.

****As you write the rest of your paper, your working thesis statement may change in word choice or sentence structure. However, it is important to keep your argumentative goal (what you plan to prove, to argue, or to explain in your paper) the same****

The Turn-Around Method

The **Turn-Around Method** is one strategy to use when writing a thesis. This method of developing a focused thesis statement poses questions about the topic, and then turns the information around to form a sentence. Here's an example beginning with a broad open-ended topic – birds.



Start by asking simple brainstorming questions:

- What color is a cardinal ? ↔ A cardinal is red.
- What foods do birds of northeastern America ↔ eat? Birds of northeastern America eat seeds, berries, and insects.

A good paper, however, needs somewhere to go – it needs to have supporting points that can be explored through careful analysis and research that is supported with examples, facts, and specific details. Therefore, asking more complicated questions can result in a more interesting thesis. The more focused the question, the more focused the

answer will be as well. The writer should then have a precise purpose and direction for the essay, which includes several options to examine at length in support of the thesis.

For Example:

How is the American cardinal able to stay in northern regions in the winter? ↔ The American cardinal is able to stay in northern regions in the winter due to several adaptive measures that ensure its warm body temperature.

Shivering

Fluffed feathers

Adjustment of metabolic rate

The wide range of possibilities within the simple topic “birds” has been narrowed down to a very specific aspect of the creature’s biological adaptive mechanisms. Getting to this point takes time and mental effort. The paper, directed by the decision of the writer to choose a narrowed focus, finally makes a statement in answer to a complex question raised during brainstorming.

Using the **inverted pyramid method** will organize the broad ideas to create a more specific idea. This allows you to prioritize your information and to determine what is essential to your argumentative direction.

Identify Topic: _____

Brainstorm five possibilities by which the topic could be examined.

As the writer, which **one** possibility is of particular interest to you?

After generating some good ideas, select **one** aspect to explore.

Pose hypothetical questions about that one aspect

What factors determine.....?

What would happen if.....?

When are?

How do.....?

Why are.....?

Now answer the one
question that has
been selected to
arrive at the
thesis.

A well-developed thesis statement is required for research papers, literary analysis, as well as informative and argumentation assignments, regardless of length. The thesis, firmly established in the introduction, guides the direction and specific focus of the research, analysis, or argument. All supporting facts, examples, and details within the paper will point back as appropriate evidence to prove the thesis idea.

An effective essay, based on the five paragraph format, includes an introduction, three supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The success of the essay will depend on determining at least three major factors, reasons, literary devices, elements, effects, causes, etc. and appropriate supporting details that stay unified on proving the answer to one of these complex questions.

Thesis:

Linking topic/ device to THEME + THESIS Method



THEME WEAVES, BRAIDS, LINKS its way through the ENTIRE paper
THESIS provides the direction, proof, argument, and REASON for theme



No sentence in your paper will vex you as much as the thesis sentence. And with good reason: **the thesis sentence is typically that ONE sentence in the paper that asserts, controls, and structures** the entire argument. Without a strong persuasive, thoughtful thesis, a paper might seem unfocused and/ or weak.

THESIS= structure, claim, and control

My
Ex

TOPIC/ DEVICE (A)	HOW / WHY TO WHAT EXTENT DOES IT FUNCTION? (B)	FOR WHAT PURPOSE/ TO WHAT END- WORK AS A WHOLE: THEME (C)
Setting and use of weather	Symbolically parallels Barry	In "Shaving", Leslie Norris presents the idea that maturity can strengthen and grow in difficult circumstances when a young person must grow up quickly.
Norris' use of weather and setting symbolically parallels Barry's maturation, showing that growth can occur after the harshest of times.		

YOUR TURN

TOPIC/ DEVICE (A)	HOW / WHY TO WHAT EXTENT DOES IT FUNCTION? (B)	FOR WHAT PURPOSE/ TO WHAT END- WORK AS A WHOLE: THEME (C)
Thesis:		