Writing Workshops

Center for Learning and Academic Support Services
(C.L.A.S.S.)
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1. Thesis statement

2. Organizing your ideas

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Thesis Statement

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2. Function of the thesis statement

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Thesis Statement

Your essay is expected to be focused on a main idea, or thesis.

In your final draft, you express this idea in a thesis statement, often at the end of your introduction.

A thesis statement can be a claim, a position, a statement, a question, or a promise.
Functions of a Thesis Statement

The thesis statement serves three crucial functions and one optional one.

• The thesis statement narrows your subject to a single idea.
• It claims something specific and significant about your subject, a claim that requires support.
• It conveys your purpose, your reason for writing.
• It often concisely previews the arrangement of ideas.
Tips for Writing Your Thesis Statement

1. An analytical paper breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or the idea, and presents this breakdown and evaluation to the audience.

• Determine what kind of paper you are writing:
  • An expository (explanatory) paper explains something to the audience.
  • An argumentative paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. This claim could be an opinion, a policy proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation. The goal of the argumentative paper is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided.
2. Your thesis statement should be specific—it should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence.

3. The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph (introduction) of the paper.

4. Your topic may change as you write, so you may revise your thesis statement to reflect exactly what you have discussed in the paper.
Example of an **analytical** thesis statement:

An analysis of the college admission process reveals two principal problems facing counselors: accepting students with high test scores or students with strong extracurricular backgrounds.

The paper that follows should:

• explain the analysis of the college admission process

• Explain the two problems facing admission counselors
In an analysis, your thesis may be more complex than for other papers. Example:

Philosopher Michael Tooley’s essay “Our Current Drug Legislation: Grounds for Reconsideration” set forth a liberterian argument in favor of reconsidering the legalization of drugs.

This argument is strong when applied to illegal drugs, such as marijuana, that do little harm to nonusers; but it is weak when applied to many harder drugs.
Example of an **expository** thesis statement:

The life of the typical college student is characterized by time spent studying, attending class, and socializing with peers.

The paper that follows should:

• Explain how students spend their time studying, attending class, and socializing with peers
Example of an **argumentative** thesis statement:

High school graduates should be required to take a year off to pursue community service projects before entering college in order to increase their maturity and global awareness.

The paper that follows should:

• Presents an argument and give evidence to support the claim that students should pursue community projects before entering college.
Research question:
How, if at all, should the Internet be taxed?

Thesis statement:
To improve equity between online and traditional stores and between consumers with and without Internet access, tax laws should be revised to allow collection of sales taxes on Internet purchases.
More Examples of Thesis Statement

Question:
What does Stephen Crane’s story “The Open Boat” reveal about the relation between humans and nature?

Thesis:
In Stephen Crane’s gripping tale “The Open Boat,” four men lost at sea discover not only that nature is indifferent to their fate but that their own particular talents make little difference as they struggle for survival.
Question:
In the Greek tragedy *Electra*, by Euripides, how do Electra and her mother, Clytemnesstra, respond to the limitation society placed on women?

Thesis:
The experience of powerlessness has taught Electra and her mother two very different lessons: Electra has learned the value of traditional, conservative sex roles for women, but Clytemnesstra has learned just the opposite.
Thesis Statement in Opening Paragraph

From the moment she is mature enough to understand commands, to the day she is married off, to the time when she bears her own children, a Vietnamese woman tries to establish a good name as a diligent daughter, a submissive wife, and an altruistic mother.
In order to be approved of by everyone, a Vietnamese daughter must work diligently to help her parents.

Once she enters an arranged marriage, a good Vietnamese woman must submit to her husband.

Finally, to be recognized favorably, a Vietnamese woman must sacrifice herself for the benefit of the children it is her duty to bear.
Supporting Claims with Evidence

There are several kinds of evidence:

• **Facts:** whose truth can be verified: *Poland is slightly smaller than New Mexico.*

• **Statistics:** facts expressed as numbers: *Of those polled, 62 percent prefer a flat tax.*

• **Examples:** specific instances of the point being made: *Many groups, such as the elderly and the disabled, would benefit from this policy.*
Expert opinions: the judgments formed by authorities on the basis of their own examination of the facts: Affirmative actions is necessary to right past injustices, a point argued by Howard Clickstein, a past director of the US Commission on Civil Rights.

Appeals: to readers’ beliefs or needs, statements that ask readers to accept as true without evidence: The shabby, antiquated chemistry lab shames the school, making it seem a second-rate institution.
Evidence must be reliable to be convincing. Ask these questions about your evidence:

- Is it **accurate**—trustworthy, exact, undistorted?
- Is it **relevant**—authoritative, pertinent, current?
- Is it **representative**—true to its context, neither under- nor over-representing any element of the sample it’s drawn from?
- Is it **adequate**—plentiful, specific?
Be aware of assumptions:

An assumption is an opinion, a principle, or a belief that ties evidence to claims: the assumption explains why a particular piece of evidence is relevant to a particular claim. For example:

**Claim**: The college’s chemistry laboratory is outdated.

**Evidence** (in part): The testimony of chemistry professors.

**Assumption**: Chemistry professors are the most capable of evaluating the present lab’s quality.