

## Writing Thesis Statements

A **thesis statement** is a sentence (or two) that presents your central **argument**<sup>1</sup> to the reader. Although they are found in many different types of university writing, thesis statements are most associated with **argumentative** or **persuasive essays**. When writing with the intent to persuade or convince the reader of your point of view, you must include a thesis statement that describes your specific argument and indicates how you will go about proving this argument over the course of your essay.

### What does a thesis statement do?

Typically located near the end of the introductory paragraph, the thesis statement is more than just an announcement of your paper's general topic. A strong thesis statement should

- inform the reader of your **position on an issue**.
- make an **arguable claim**.
- act as a “**road map**” for the essay.
- be **concise** and **refined**.
- be **focused** and **specific** enough to be adequately explored within the bounds of the essay.
- be supported by **evidence** that you will describe and analyze in the main body of the essay.

The content of your essay's main body paragraphs should always link back to your thesis statement; your supporting points should all serve to strengthen your position with details, evidence, and analyses that help to prove your main argument. Avoid blanket generalizations, statements of common knowledge, and points that cannot be argued (e.g., *Physical activity impacts health in many different ways*). A weak and unfocused thesis statement will leave your reader unsure of your central point and confused about the purpose of your essay, usually resulting in a vague and unconvincing argument.

### Developing a thesis statement from a general topic

Instructors often provide broad essay topics which must be narrowed down significantly in order to create a workable thesis. For instance, *social media and mental health* might be an interesting general topic for a paper, but it is not a focused enough topic upon which to base a thesis statement. You might narrow a given topic by focusing on a particular **demographic** (e.g., adolescents, office workers), **location** (e.g., central Tokyo, the Cape Breton Highlands), or **time period** (e.g., over the last decade, in the early 2000s).

Keeping in mind the *who, what, when, where, why, and how* of the topic helps you move from a general topic to a more focused one. You can then develop a question about the topic that your essay will answer, called a **research question**; the answer to the research question will be your thesis statement. In most cases, the introduction of the essay will narrow like this: **general topic > focused topic > research question > answer/position (thesis statement)**

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<sup>1</sup> When we talk about arguments, we're not talking about people bickering with each other verbally. In academic writing, an argument is a claim based on evidence; in an essay, this claim is usually introduced via a thesis statement.

To help narrow a general topic further, ask yourself questions such as these:

- **What do you already know about this topic?** Jot down a few bullet-point notes listing everything you can think of about your topic. Brainstorming ideas can help you narrow the scope of your research question to aspects of the topic that you have prior knowledge about or particular interest in.
- **What are the key issues related to your topic?** Consult scholarly sources (books, academic journal articles, etc.) to learn more about your topic. What are the keywords and concepts associated with your topic? How do they relate to your argument?
- **What have other scholars said about this topic? Do you agree or disagree with them?** Locate where you stand in relation to other scholars in your field. How might you incorporate their perspectives into your own? For instance, is there a certain popular argument that you strongly disagree with? Why? What evidence might you use to refute this argument?
- **What lens(es) might you use to examine this topic?** Consider what you want to say about your topic. What sort of theoretical perspective might you take? For instance, looking at an issue from a feminist perspective will generate different possibilities than a Marxist perspective.

Whether you or your instructor has chosen the overall topic of your paper, the process of developing a strong thesis statement will take time. As you write, do research, and refine your argument, your thesis may change in light of new information. This is a normal part of the writing process. If the focus of your argument shifts, revise your thesis statement to ensure that it accurately reflects the ideas discussed in your essay. This keeps your reader on track and allows them to better understand and appreciate your overall argument.