

A Quick Guide to Constructing Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?

The thesis statement is a key part of an essay. Usually found at the end of the introduction, the thesis statement shows the reader the topic of the paper, the parts of the argument, and the direction of the paper. The order of the arguments in the thesis statement shows the order of the arguments in the essay. Without a thesis statement, it is hard to discern whether an essay is argumentative or descriptive. It can even be hard to tell what the paper's purpose is.

Why do I need a thesis statement?

Here is a thesis statement which shows the importance of a thesis statement:

The thesis statement is the most important sentence in an essay because it presents the writer's claim, describes the writer's arguments, and illustrates the paper's direction.

In other words, a thesis statement shows the **topic of the essay** (which sentences are important in an essay), the **argument of the essay** ("the thesis statement is the most important sentence in an essay"), and the **evidence for the argument**. Without a thesis statement, the reader may not understand what your essay is actually about. As a result, your argument may appear weak because the reader may not see how your points relate to a specific argument.

How do I make a thesis statement?

Getting started

Although there are many ways to get started writing a thesis statement, one good way is to make a list of things you know about the topic. Once that is done, look at the things you've written to see if there are important points that will help make an argument. Then you can put these points together into a thesis statement.

Putting it together

While thesis statements come in many styles and sizes, the best type to start with is one where the claim and the three arguments are clearly stated, like in the bubble below. This type of thesis statement can be viewed as consisting of two main parts: **the claim** and the three arguments.

The French Revolution of 1789 would have been impossible without the printing press because it (1) increased revolutionary authorship, (2) disseminated radical ideology, and (3) targeted middle-class citizens.

Following this basic structure is a good way to ensure that your thesis statement is complete. It is also possible to switch the order of the thesis statement so that the evidence comes first. This style of thesis statement would read, “Because it (1), (2), (3), the French Revolution of 1789 would have been impossible without the printing press.”

How do I make a really strong thesis statement?

The two most important things to keep in mind when constructing a strong thesis statement are proper tone and overall clarity.

Tone

Be sure that your thesis has an assertive tone. “Shakespeare’s use of metaphor in this sonnet may show the reader that...” is a weak statement. Instead of “may show,” words like “demonstrates,” “is,” and “proves” are stronger. If it sounds as though you are unsure of your argument, the reader will also be unconvinced.

Clarity

When writing a thesis statement, less is more: the more words you have in your thesis statement, the more confusing it gets. You have the whole paper to explain and to prove your argument, so state it as briefly as you can. For example, the statement “Capital punishment fails to deter homicide” is much more direct than “Capital punishment is not the best way of preventing criminals from committing murder.”

In academic writing, be careful using the word “not” because it can be ambiguous. For example, consider the statement, “Capital punishment is not a good deterrent.” Is capital punishment an excellent or an awful deterrent? The reader has no idea. We only know it isn’t “good.”