How to Write a Thesis Statement
Monday, April 11 @ 7 pm ET
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Access the workshop recording here:
http://khe2.adobeconnect.com/p6wk64dbr3/
Learning Objectives

• Define “thesis statement”
• List qualities of a strong thesis statement
• Recognize a path to thesis development
• Recognize types of thesis statements according to purpose

Our objectives for this workshop are to define what a thesis statement is, list the qualities of a strong thesis, so you know how to write an effective thesis statement, and to recognize a path to develop a thesis—it does take a process to arrive at one. Also, I’ll show you three examples of thesis statements to show how thesis statements differ according to the purpose of the paper.
What is a thesis statement?

Dominant idea

Main point

Claim

A thesis gives your paper focus and direction. You always want to keep your audience in mind when you’re writing, and the thesis is what keeps the reader focused on your main point—the dominant idea that you’re trying to convey. A thesis statement is usually one sentence that asserts the main point in your essay or the claim for your argument—what you want your reader to know or what you want your reader to believe. Although the thesis statement is a sentence, the thesis is also a theme that runs through your whole paper, holding it together like a backbone whereas the rest of the information in the paper fleshes it out to give it form and movement.
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To establish and maintain focus on your main idea or thesis, it's usually most effective to express your thesis in one sentence, one statement. Since the thesis statement asserts something is true or so about a topic, the thesis statement needs to identify that topic—the subject you are writing about—organic farming, childhood obesity, police corruption, Internet security, or undocumented workers. The second part of the thesis is the idea you want your reader to understand or believe about the topic; however, this idea needs to go beyond common knowledge or what your reader would already know. You wouldn’t want a thesis that simply stated that there are undocumented workers in the United States or that obesity is a health issue. Your educated, academic readers already know these things. You want to state something that readers wouldn’t easily know or believe if you want them to read the paper. The paper then exists to prove, illustrate, explain, or analyze the thesis in a way that helps a reader to understand it or agree with you.
Where does a thesis statement go?
In the introduction (usually at the end)

Gain the reader’s interest with an interesting fact or illustration that makes the topic clear. Narrow the topic with background information or context to show that it is important and relevant to your reader. **Assert the claim about the topic that you want the reader to understand or believe.**

Most academic readers expect the thesis to go at the end of the introduction. In a short academic essay, one to ten pages, the introduction is usually one paragraph long, and the thesis statement is the last sentence of it. This is not a rule, just a guideline for nonfiction, academic essays. This is because in academic writing you want your ideas to progress logically to both anticipate and answer the reader’s questions as you develop your ideas. In the beginning of a paper, a reader will be asking “What is this paper about?” “Why should I care?” and “What's the point?” So the introduction will therefore begin with a catchy fact or example to gain the reader’s attention and make the topic clear. Then you'll want to provide some context or background information to define the particular issue or aspect of the topic that is important or relevant to you and your reader, and then you assert your claim about that issue, and this claim is the thesis: the statement that expresses what is true or happening in regards to the issue or what should be believed or done
about it depending on the purpose of the paper. If your purpose is to inform, for example, your goal would be to help the reader understand the issue. If your purpose is to persuade, your goal would be to sway the reader to believe something about the issue and possibly do something about it.
Where does a thesis statement go?
In the introduction (usually at the end)

Pedro is an undocumented immigrant who has held a job washing dishes for ten years in a NY restaurant. Like any employee, taxes and Social Security were withheld from his pay: money he will never see again not having a social security number to file a tax return. Yet he still managed to save $59,000. However, upon his return to Guatemala with his savings, the US Boarder Patrol confiscated every dollar (“Debate,” 2008). The situation reflects the serious predicament of many illegal immigrants. Some argue that all illegal immigrants should be deported. But 12 million undocumented immigrants live and work in the United States (Carpenter, 2006). Mass deportation would devastate the US economy. **Illegal immigrants who work and pay taxes should be permitted to stay and apply for citizenship, not only because they contribute to American society but also because they need to be protected by labor laws.**

In this example, the intro begins with an example of the issue, goes on to explain what the problem is, and then asserts the thesis as a persuasive claim that something specific needs to happen to solve the problem.
Do you need a thesis before you begin?

1. Know your assignment
2. Prewrite
3. Research to see what’s out there
4. Create a research question
5. Create a working thesis

Writing a thesis statement, like writing most anything, is a process. First, you need to know your assignment and understand its purpose and who your audience is to be—are you writing to inform coworkers about a new policy? Are you writing to persuade members of a community to solve a social problem a certain way? Your assignment may also require specific rhetorical modes such as analyzing, evaluating, or comparing and contrasting. Your assignment may also limit the topic. For example, you may be asked to write about the career you are pursuing, or you may be asked to consider a theory learned in class and write about how you would apply it in a certain situation.

The next step is to prewrite. Prewriting helps you uncover what you already know about a topic, what you didn’t know you knew, and what don’t yet know and want to find out. There are various strategies for prewriting, which you will find described here: [http://library.kaplan.edu/ld.php?content_id=6328550](http://library.kaplan.edu/ld.php?content_id=6328550)

If you are asked to include research in your paper, you would then do some preliminary research to see what is out there on your topic. Go to the library and enter some search terms and see what comes up. Narrow your search as you go: skim titles and abstracts and see what is being discussed, who is discussing it, if there are some trends, common themes, or issues in these discussions that interest you. Once you find some information on your topic that you like, you will want to create a research question to keep you focused on that area of interest in the topic.

For example, if you were pursuing a career in nursing and wanted to write about nursing, your research question might be “What do nurses do?” or if in your preliminary research you found a few articles about nurses abusing prescription medication, your research question might be “What impact is prescription pill abuse having on the nursing profession?”

Then you are ready to create a working thesis to again help you focus your research and writing. Taking the research question, “What impact has prescription pill abuse had on the nursing profession?” Your working thesis would answer the question by turning it into a statement such as “Prescription pill abuse has impacted the nursing profession in x, y, and z ways,” and you would continue your research to find out what those ways are.
Can I change my thesis after I’ve started writing?

1. Know your assignment
2. Prewrite
3. Research to see what’s out there
4. Create a research question
5. Create a working thesis
6. Write paper
7. Revise thesis as needed

As you write your paper then, you may need to revise your thesis. For example, if you end up writing more about emergency room nurses instead of the nursing profession in general, so you could change the wording of your thesis, so it’s more specific. Or maybe you come upon so much information about medical mistakes that you want to change your focus and make medical mistakes the dominant topic instead of prescription pills because you found that drug abuse is only one of several causes of medical mistakes by nurses, the others being stress and lack of training, so you revise your thesis to say that “Medical mistakes in nursing are attributed to stress, lack of training, and substance abuse.” As long as you are still adhering to the assignment, you can and will probably modify your thesis during the writing process even if to just word it more concisely.
Working Informative Thesis Statement

• Reports information
• Objective, analytical
• Not persuasive or evaluative
• States something exists, is true, or is happening

Now that we know the important characteristics of a thesis and how to arrive at a working thesis, let's look at some examples. If your purpose is to write informatively, you are going to be reporting your information objectively. While you do want to analyze the topic and report it in a new and interesting way, when writing to inform, you aren't to express any bias toward the topic or state what you think should happen or evaluate its effectiveness. You are essentially presenting an issue or perhaps a problem just to tell about it so the reader understands it better. Your thesis would therefore make a claim asserting that something is true or so about your topic, or you could claim that something has happened or is happening.
Working Informative Thesis: Examples

Here are a couple examples:

The effect of television violence on ratings has varied from decade to decade and depends on what society at large views as acceptable in each era.

Governments of the United States and Great Britain are tackling the issue of childhood obesity in different ways according to the established traditions of their health care systems.

This thesis claims that something is happening. It’s asserting that the effect of something depends on something else.

Governments of the United States and Great Britain are addressing the same problem but differently.

This claim also states that something is happening. It’s asserting that two governments are addressing the same problem but differently.
Working Persuasive Thesis Statement

- Debatable issue
- Thesis expresses a position on the issue
- Uses words like *should, must,* and *needs*
- States something should exist, be believed, or happen.

If your purpose is to write persuasively, you are going to be presenting your information so that readers are swayed to see things your way or accept your position as a valid one even if they hold an opposing viewpoint. You still have to be objective in your tone and use logic and research to support your reasoning, but in a persuasive essay, you do want to make your stance on the issue clear, so your thesis will therefore state that something should, must, ought to, or needs to happen or be done or thought of in a certain way.
Working Persuasive Thesis: Examples

Here are a few examples:

- Photojournalists in war zones should always be embedded with military troops for their own protection.
- College athletes perform a valuable service for their schools and should be paid for their performance.
- Due to the population shift in the Eastern Boulevard area, the Jones County school district needs to be restructured to accommodate expanding populations.
Three-Point Thesis

• The topic or issue

• The writer’s stance on the topic.

• Plan of development

Sometimes you will be asked to write a three-point thesis. This type of thesis statement goes one step further and not only identifies the topic and makes a claim about it, but it also provides a plan of development by listing the supporting points that will be discussed in the paper.
Three-Point Thesis: Examples

Here are a couple examples:

*The parents of children with a genetic predisposition towards obesity can help their children avoid obesity by controlling the children's diet, providing regular exercise, and promoting a healthy lifestyle.*

*Instead of expelling students who bully, high school administrators should help reduce instances of bullying by instituting a zero-tolerance policy for fighting, holding alternative dispute resolution classes, and establishing a teen court program.*
Questions and Review

A thesis statement
- expresses the main idea,
- comes at the end of the introduction,
- involves prewriting and research to write,
- makes an informative or persuasive claim,
- and may provide an organizational plan.

To review, a thesis statement expresses the main idea of a paper. It comes at the end of the introduction. It involves prewriting and preliminary research to write, and you might want to modify it as you write your paper too. You want to be clear about your assignment regarding the type of thesis to create, but it will either be informative or persuasive, and it can also provide an organizational plan for the
essay by including the topics that support your thesis and what will be discussed in the body of the paper.
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