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WHAT I THINK THESIS  
WRITING IS LIKE:



# How To: Write an Effective Thesis Statement

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## Purpose:

The reason for a thesis statement is to capture the main point, idea, argument, or central message of a paper. It should only be one to two sentences long. A thesis



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needs to present the topic of the paper and make a comment on your position in relation to the topic.

## Placement:

- It should appear early in your essay. The best place for a thesis is at the end of your introduction. However, for longer essays it can be placed in the second paragraph.
- Avoid burying it in the middle of a paragraph.

## Formulating a Thesis Statement:

- Must be clear and specific.
- Do not use vague words such as; “interesting,” “unusual,” and “difficult.”
- Avoid sentence structures like, “The point of my paper is...”
- The thesis statement should be limited to what can be accomplished in the amount of pages that has been assigned by your professor.
- It is important to avoid being too general; otherwise, your paper could end up only skimming the surface of your topic.
- Avoid using quotes.

Example of a too general thesis and possible revisions for a more specific thesis.

- **Original thesis:**
  - There are serious objections to today's horror movies.
- **Revised theses:**
  - Because modern cinematic techniques have allowed filmmakers to get more graphic, horror flicks have desensitized young American viewers to violence.
  - The pornographic violence in "bloodbath" slasher movies degrades both men and women.
  - Today's slasher movies fail to deliver the emotional catharsis that 1930s horror films did.

Example of an unclear thesis and how to revise for clarity.



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- **Original thesis:** Although the timber wolf is a timid and gentle animal, it is being systematically exterminated. [if it's so timid and gentle -- why is it being exterminated?]
  - **Revised thesis:** Although the timber wolf is actually a timid and gentle animal, it is being systematically exterminated because people wrongfully believe it to be a fierce and cold-blooded killer.

## Your Thesis and Your Position:

- Instead of stating a fact or making a simple statement, you have to decide where you stand on the topic.
- Avoid simply announcing the topic like, “In this paper I will discuss the racial injustice in America.”
- Avoid making a universal or pro/con judgement that oversimplifies complex issues like, “We must save the whales.”
- When you make a (subjective) judgement call, specify and justify your reasoning. For instance: “If the government takes over industry in Kenya, the industry will become more efficient.”

## Remember!

It is ok to not have a perfect thesis in the first draft. It will probably change as you revise and develop your ideas. Just make sure that the final draft has the best thesis for your paper, not the basic one you thrown together at the beginning.

## More to Consider:

When writing your thesis statement, it is also important to keep in mind what kind of a paper you are writing. This will help determine the kind of thesis to write.

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

If you are writing a text that does not fall under these three categories (e.g., a narrative), a thesis statement somewhere in the first paragraph could still be helpful to your reader.

## The S.P.A.R.S. of Thesis Statement Writing:

If there is still some question as to what should be in a thesis statement or how to write one, here are some extra tips to keep mind.

**Substantial** - Your thesis should be a claim for which it is easy to answer every reader's question: "So what?"

**Precise** - An effective thesis statement has been narrowed down from a very broad subject. Your claim should not be something on which whole books could be written.

**Arguable** - A thesis statement should not be a statement of fact or an assertion with which every reader is likely to immediately agree. (Otherwise, why try to convince your readers with an argument?)

**Relevant** - If you are responding to an assignment, the thesis should answer the question your teacher has posed. In order to stay focused, pay attention to the task words in the assignment: summarize, argue, compare/contrast, etc.

**Supportable** - A thesis must be a claim that you can prove with the evidence at hand (e.g., evidence from your texts or from your research). Your claim should not be outlandish, nor should it be mere personal opinion or preference (e.g., "Frederick Douglass is my favorite historical figure.")

## Resources

- I. <http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/thesis/>
- II. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/>



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III. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/>

