

The Thesis Statement

Every essay has a thesis statement that informs the reader of your central argument or position. It is the backbone of your essay and the main focus of your analysis. The thesis statement is a sentence (or a couple of sentences) found at the end of the introduction to your essay, and it is an essential element of an academic essay. Ultimately, it represents the central insight, proposition, or explication of what you consider to be the most significant or interesting aspect of your topic or area of research.

What is a thesis statement?

- **It takes a stand rather** than simply announcing a general subject to your reader.
- **It is an argument** that someone could either agree or disagree with.
- **It is the main idea of your essay** that can be supported by academic evidence.
- **It is narrow and specific** making it manageable to develop into a proper essay.

What is NOT thesis statement?

- **It is NOT a description:** *This essay will discuss social justice in Latin America.*
- **It is NOT self-evident:** *Chronic hunger is a serious problem in the world.*
- **It is NOT a question:** *What are the causes of global warming?*
- **It is NOT a personal belief:** *A university degree is better than a college diploma.*
- **It is NOT a generalization:** *Women played an important role in World War I.*

Approaches to Writing an Effective Thesis Statement

- **Create an Argument**
 - State your position on an issue, topic, or subject area that allows for either agreement or disagreement from your reader.

Example: *James Joyce's Ulysses helped create a new way for writers to deal with the unconscious by utilizing the findings of Freudian psychology and introducing the techniques of literary stream-of-consciousness.*

- **Be Specific**
 - Avoid making a vague or general statement.

Example of a vague thesis statement:

Women in Canada played an important role during World War II.

Example of a specific thesis statement:

Canadian women played a vital role during World War II by working in industries, providing medical attention to soldiers, and being primary caregivers to families, thus making them as essential as men to the war effort.

- **Narrow Your Topic**
 - A narrow thesis statement eliminates the problem of having to write on a subject that is too broad and unmanageable for a standard academic essay.

Example of a broad thesis statement:

The criminal justice system in Canada has many problems.

Example of a narrow thesis statement:

Due to its large bureaucratic structure, the criminal justice system in Canada lacks efficient communication between its various departments which leads to prolonged delays and excessive court backlogs.

- **Be Reasonable**

- Whenever possible, try to think of your writing as a form of persuasion where you develop a thesis and then back it up. With this in mind, you will want to choose a reasonable position or argument that can be defended in a convincing and appropriate manner.

Example of an unreasonable thesis statement:

People do not care about the environment.

Example of a reasonable thesis statement:

Although there are some people who show little respect for the environment, there are many people who are genuinely trying to create a more environmentally-friendly world.

Combining a Thesis Statement with a Mapping Scheme

Some thesis statements include a mapping scheme, or outline, within the statement itself. We discuss mapping schemes in more detail in the *Introductions module*, but because thesis statements and mapping schemes are sometimes combined, it is worth mentioning here. Note the following example:

The first-past-the-post electoral system should be abolished because it does not represent the wishes of voters and it is unconstitutional.

The thesis statement is *the first-past-the-post electoral system should be abolished*. However, in this example, we have also added the two main points that will be argued in the essay: that the system does not represent the wishes of voters and that it is unconstitutional.

In this type of thesis statement, the mapping scheme does not *replace* the argument of the thesis; it merely *combines* the thesis statement and the mapping scheme.

References

Handout adapted from SMU WHO unit on Thesis Statements and Queen's Writing Centre module.

Skwire, Sarah E. and D. Skwire (2005). *Writing with a Thesis: A Rhetoric and Reader*, 9th ed. Boston, Massachusetts: Thomson Wadsworth.