

Thesis Statements

You should include a thesis statement if you are writing a persuasive essay, or a research-driven argumentative essay (often teachers just call this a “research paper”). Your thesis statement should express a clear, informed view on a debatable issue.

Not every type of essay needs a thesis statement; some may call for a “guiding idea” instead (see reverse).

4 Qualities of a Strong Thesis Statement:

1. **Makes a claim**
2. **Narrow**
3. **Supportable**
4. **Not an announcement**

1. Your thesis should make a claim (an argument). This means that your thesis should take a stance that a reasonable, educated person *could* disagree with. If you can prove your statement is true just by providing statistics, it is a **fact** not a **claim**. You should choose a side on a debatable (or controversial) issue and support your opinion with reasoning and evidence.

Weak thesis: African American teenagers are more likely to be arrested or treated with excessive force by police officers than white teenagers. (This is not a claim; it’s a well-documented fact.)

One Revision: African American teenagers are more likely to be arrested or treated with excessive force by police officers than white teenagers because of x, y, and z. (Makes a claim about the causes.)

This is a claim because a reasonable, educated person might think that x, y, and z are not the main reasons why discrimination occurs, or they might think that your essay ignores more important factors.

Another Revision: African American teenagers are more likely to be arrested or treated with excessive force by police officers than white teenagers; we can begin to solve this problem by x and y. (Makes a claim that argues for a solution.)

This is a claim because a reasonable, educated person might think that doing x and y won’t solve the problem. Or your reader might think your solution is unrealistic, impossible, or problematic in some way.

2. Your thesis should be narrow.

Weak thesis: The housing shortage in Santa Barbara should be addressed. (This is not specific enough to be considered a claim; you can revise it by naming who should address the issue, how the issue should be addressed, or narrowing the topic in some other way.)

One Revision: The City of Santa Barbara needs to do x and y in order to address the housing shortage in Santa Barbara. (Makes a claim that argues for a solution.)

You can start writing with a *working thesis* (the argument that you are guessing you will make), and then revise your thesis as you learn more about the topic through research.

3. Your thesis should be supportable. Your thesis statement should be something that you can defend using evidence and reasoning, rather than a personal preference or a value judgement.

Weak thesis: Capital punishment is immoral. (This is a value judgement.)

One Revision: Capital punishment, as implemented in the U.S., is applied disproportionately to minorities and people who have inadequate legal representation and is, therefore, unjust.

Thesis Statements Continued

4. Your thesis should not announce your topic. Avoid language like “this paper is about,” especially for shorter papers. Instead your thesis should preview the main points you will make about the topic.

Weak thesis: This paper will explore the legalization of physician-assisted suicide in California.

One Revision: Physician-assisted suicide, which became legal in California in October 2015, should remain legal because of x and y. (Signals the main points for the reader.)

And remember: your thesis should be written as a statement, not a question.

Thesis Statements vs. Guiding Ideas

For writing assignments that do not require you to make a claim (like “reflection papers”), you should still preview the content of your paper with a sentence near the beginning that mentions your **central idea** or **main point**. This type of statement is sometimes called a **guiding idea**. Without a guiding idea, papers can seem unfocused, vague, and dull.

Your guiding idea might describe:

1. How a reading or class discussion led to a personal realization, deepened your understanding, or changed your perspective on a topic.

Example: Reading “Why Zebras Don’t Get Ulcers” has made me more aware of how our bodies pay the price for our negative thoughts which trigger our flight or fight response.

2. How a reading or topic covered in class has practical applications.

(For example, how the reading can be applied to a business plan you are creating, or your therapist traineeship, or your teaching practicum, etc.)

Example: The chapter gave me advice that will help me use visual media and cater to a variety of learning styles in my upcoming 4th grade classroom takeover.

Example: I used to think that mindfulness was useful for managing stress, but after reading the article I now realize that mindfulness can also help elementary school teachers create a communal classroom environment and manage behavioral issues.

3. How a concept from class can be used to analyze a text, film, or situation.

(How a course concept can be used as a theoretical lens.)

Example: In most movies I have seen with a character that has a mental illness, the artistic nature of the film tends to soften the rawness that comes along with mental illness. Unless the film is a documentary, this is almost always going to happen. It must be very difficult to align what the director and writer wants to do, and at the same time portray the exact symptoms of a mental illness. ~Natalie Alderson, AUSB peer writing tutor