

# Thesis Statements

A thesis statement serves as the argument or claim around which your essay is organized. When people finish reading what you've written, what central message do you want them to take away? That's your thesis.

Normally, an author states his/her thesis early in an essay, providing the reader with a map of what's to come. Often, the thesis also appears near the end of an essay, and the author builds toward it throughout the piece of writing. When deciding where to place your thesis statement, consider the nature of the writing, the needs of your audience, instructor guidelines, and discipline-specific expectations or requirements.

Research, reflection, writing, and conversation can help you determine your thesis. Stay open to revising it as you clarify what you want to say. In the end, be sure the thesis statement and the content of your essay align. That is, the details in your essay should support the stated thesis!

## The Basics

### A Thesis Statement

- Expresses one central idea
- Justifies discussion, is debatable
- Takes a stand, asserts your own conclusion based on evidence and/or reasoning
- Should help the reader answer the question: Why does this subject matter?
- Is normally a single sentence or a short series of connected sentences
- Often has two or more parts, connected by "hinge" words or phrases, such as "but," "and," "because," or "as a result"

### A Thesis Statement is not

- A question or a list
- A simple statement of fact
- Vague

### Sample Thesis Statements from AUNE Peer Tutors

The thesis statements below were adapted from student writing and are used with permission.

"In group therapy, the anxious patient learns how to manage anxiety in the midst of group sessions, which involve many more dynamic social interactions than a one-on-one session possibly could; as a result, the individual can make remarkable changes in a compressed time frame." (*Aubry Koehler*)

"Because trees use and store large quantities of CO<sub>2</sub>, they are critical to efforts to mitigate increasing carbon dioxide emissions and key to slowing climate change." (*Tracy Bartella*)

“My transition from omnivore to “flexitarian”/vegetarian has been neither smooth nor successful, but given how much I’ve learned en route—about environmental degradation and my own entrenched behaviors around eating habits—the process has been worth it.” (*Matt Young*)

“Colonial legacies divide communities, de-legitimize their legal and moral rights, and separate them from their land-bases; to be effective, commons management must counter these legacies using both top-down and bottom-up strategies.” (*John Dunham*)

*Originally developed by Cindy Snow for the AUNE Writing Center*

### Thesis Writing Tips!

- Your Thesis Statement should answer an essential question. For example, perhaps your assignment is to write about an environmental issue. Your essential question might be: “How can we decrease ocean pollution?” Your thesis statement, then, would be your answer: “Ocean pollution can be decreased by...”
- Tailor your thesis statement to the assignment. Are you writing an argumentative paper? Compare and contrast? Expository? A personal narrative? If you’re writing an argumentative paper, your thesis statement should argue a point, where as a thesis in a personal narrative might simply foreshadow an event or discuss something you learned about a story you’re about to tell.
- Write your thesis statement on an index card and tape it to your computer or your desk so that every time you begin a new paragraph, you can re-read it and ask yourself if this next paragraph’s topic supports or further elaborates on your thesis statement.
- Your thesis statement doesn’t help just your reader— it serves as a compass to continually point you in the right direction. Sometimes we get lost in our own papers and get distracted by tangents and details. The thesis statement reminds you of your own point so that you stay on the road you’re paving for yourself.

*Developed by Jessica Garcia, MFA, for Antioch University*

### Theses and Rhetoric

The expectation of having a thesis in our academic writing comes from the rhetoricians of Ancient Greece. These orators (Plato & Aristotle, for example) evaluated the success of persuasive speech, or rhetoric, very carefully and methodically. One way to evaluate a claim derived from the rationale made by the premises, or support of the thesis. One’s persuasion was deemed successful by the logic and proof of three premises.

### Using Classical Rhetoric to compose thesis statements:

Use this simple guide can help in creating a thesis statement.

First, identify your topic and your angle or stance

Consider referring to the five w’s + h of journalism: “Who,” “What,” “Where,” “When,” “Why,” and “How.” While you’re not obligated to identify each, “Who,” “What,” “Where,” and “When” are features of your topic. “Why?” or “How?” become the angle or your stance.

Next, create three premises that support the “angle.”

From here, you have a choice of writing a “simple” thesis using the Enthymeme or a more complex statement with the Syllogism. While the language here is sophisticated, it’s really quite simple:

**Let’s try it:**

Recently, I listened to an NPR program calling attention to the marketability of Romance Fiction, the features of that literary genre, and the consistent presence of the female protagonist, who, while falling for the dashing hero, is typically a powerful, independent woman.

Let’s say I want to research the contemporary fiction market and the apparent disregard for romance novels as “formulaic” and “supermarket fiction.”

Topic:

Who: Heroines/Female Protagonists

What: Romance Novels

Where: Fiction

When: Historically & Current (implied)

Stance/Angle: (I’ll list all that I’m interested in)

Why:

- Powerful, independent female protagonists
- Lack of female writers getting published
- Good start & income for these writers

How:

- Judged as unoriginal or simplistic
- Will prove the complex plots and they present gender equality

**The Enthymeme:** Use “because” to connect the topic with two of the premises.

E.G. “Romance novels should not be derided as simplistic, formulaic writing because they typically feature powerful heroines in a fictional market lacking feminine voices.”

Notice that two premises are presented here: powerful heroines and the lack of feminine voices in the mass market.

Tracy's thesis statement from above is another example of an enthymeme: "Because trees use and store large quantities of CO<sub>2</sub>, they are critical to efforts to mitigate increasing carbon dioxide emissions and key to slowing climate change." (Tracy Bartella)

**The Syllogism:** Use all three premises in demonstrating a complex relationship for the reader and typically include a transitional word/expression; such as, therefore or as a result.

E.G. "The romance novel offers readers complex plots with strong female characterization; therefore, the genre does not deserve the evaluation as simplistic or formulaic."

Here, the introductory assertion (or claim) about the complex plots and strong female characters is connected with another claim dismissing formulaic plots.

Aubry's thesis statement from above is another example of a syllogism: "In group therapy, the anxious patient learns how to manage anxiety in the midst of group sessions, which involve many more dynamic social interactions than a one-on-one session possibly could; as a result, the individual can make remarkable changes in a compressed time frame." (Aubry Koehler)

### Thesis Writing Tips!

Remember, a Thesis is NOT:

- A question: "What is the impact of pollution on the National Parks?"
- A statement of the obvious: "Cigarettes cause lung cancer."
- An illogical, offensive, prejudicial, or exaggerated claim: "The Holocaust did not exist."

A Thesis is:

- Your answer to the issue.
- A statement or claim responding to the debate.
- Qualified and rational based on supported premises.

Consider allowing your thesis to evolve; in fact, consider creating a "working thesis" to help guide your research and allow this statement to evolve as your learning impacts your writing.