

# How to Write a Thesis Statement

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## WHAT IS A THESIS STATEMENT?

A thesis statement is one or two sentences, usually placed at the end of your introduction that describes the main focus of your essay. A thesis statement is essential for an academic essay. In the writing process, it is the main organising idea for your essay that helps to keep you focused and on topic. For your readers, it serves as a 'roadmap' for where you are going to take them with your essay.

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

### WHAT TYPE OF ESSAY ARE YOU WRITING?

- ✎ Has your instructor asked you to assess, evaluate, analyse, or determine something? If so, you are writing an **analytical essay**.
- ✎ Your thesis statement will express the chief conclusions of your analysis.
  - E.g. While there have been many claims that vaccines can cause autism, an analysis of the scientific data shows that vaccines do not actually play a role in children developing autism spectrum disorder.
- ✎ If your instructor has asked you to write a compare/contrast or cause/effect essay, then you are writing **expository** (explanatory) paper.
  - Your thesis statement will identify the main causes/effects that you have identified in a **cause/effect essay**.
    - E.g. The main factor that leads college age teens to attempt suicide is depression caused by extreme stress about academic performance, alcohol abuse or drug addiction.
  - Or, your thesis statement may describe the main differences or similarities you will be discussing in a **compare/contrast essay**.
    - E.g. While both countries are multi-cultural in nature, with very large immigrant populations, the chief difference between the Canadian and the American approach to their immigrant populations is Canada's adoption of the "cultural mosaic" as opposed to the American "melting pot".
- If your instructor has assigned an **argumentative** (position) paper, then you will be making a claim about a topic and presenting arguments based on evidence that support your claim.
  - Your thesis statement will identify your main claim/conclusion about your topic and the main supporting points you will be developing in the body of your essay.
    - E.g. Act Utilitarianism ultimately fails as a moral theory because the calculation of consequences can be cumbersome, there is no guarantee of justice and, the "greater good argument" may be used to justify some behaviour that we intuitively would condemn as evil. Therefore, it cannot always tell us what we are morally required to do.

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## SUCCESSFUL THESIS STATEMENTS SHOULD BE:

1. **Direct (focussed):** It should tell the reader exactly what your paper is about in 1 or 2 sentences.
2. **Limited in scope:** You should be able to make your case within the limits of your paper.
3. **Arguable:** people can agree or disagree with your position
4. **Supportable:** there is evidence to support your position

### Thesis statements should *not*:



Be simply an observation. E.g.: “There is a lot of traffic in Vancouver”

Be the title. E.g.: “Vancouver traffic problems”


Ask a question. E.g.: “What do you think about Vancouver’s traffic?”

## WRITING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT:


### Step One: Formulate a question that your essay will answer.

-  Read your material closely, review your notes and identify questions or ideas that you may want to write about.
-  **Examples:** How does the author use foreshadowing in this novel?  
What purpose does mitosis serve in the lifespan of a cell?  
What does this director’s portrayal of teen life tell us about human nature?

### Step Two: Point form answers to your question.

-  Brainstorm and write down some general points that express your ideas about possible ways to answer your question.
  - Select your best answers based on your research or knowledge of your topic

### Step Three: Combine Steps 1 & 2

-  Turn the question and your best answer(s) into a combination sentence that tells the reader what your paper is about.

Depending on the complexity of the topic, a thesis may be a single-point statement or it may have 3 or more points supporting it. (See the examples above)