

Academic Writing Guide: How to Write a Thesis Statement

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement is a sentence, usually placed at the end of your introduction, that describes the focus of your essay. A thesis statement is essential for an academic essay. In the writing process, it is the main organizing 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.

Beginning: Identify Your Essay Type

Goal	Argumentative	Cause & Effect/Compare & Contrast	Analytical
Essay Goal	Makes a claim and argues one side of a topic/issue.	Explain the cause and effect of something or the similarities and differences between multiple things.	Assess, evaluate, or analyse something.
Thesis Goal	State your central claim/conclusion about your topic and main supporting points.	Identify the main causes/effects you've identified OR Describe the main differences/similarities you will be discussing.	Express the conclusions of your analysis.

Examples of Thesis Statements

Argumentative Thesis

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.

Cause & Effect Thesis

The main factor that leads college age teens to attempt suicide is depression, which is often caused by extreme stress about academic performance, alcohol abuse, or drug addiction.

Compare & Contrast Thesis

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'.

Analytical Essay Thesis

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.

Successful Thesis Criteria

A good thesis should be...

1. Direct
 - a. It should tell the reader exactly what your paper is about.
2. Limited in scope
 - a. You should be able to make your case within the limits of your paper.
3. Arguable
 - a. People should have the chance to agree or disagree with your position.
4. Supportable
 - a. There should be evidence to support your position.

Thesis statements should not...

1. Be simply an observation
 - a. Example: "There is a lot of rain in Vancouver."
2. Be the title
 - a. Example: "Vancouver's annual rainfall."
3. Ask a question
 - a. Example: "What do you think of Vancouver's rain?"

Writing a Strong Thesis: Three Steps

1. Decide what question your essay will answer.

- Read your material/notes closely, identify questions or ideas 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?

2. Answer your question in point form.

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

3. Combine Steps One and Two

- Turn the question and your best answer into a combination sentence that tells the reader what your paper is about.
 - Note: Depending on the complexity of the topic, a thesis may be a single-point statement or it may have three or more points supporting it (see examples above).

For additional help, please make an appointment with a Writing & Learning Centre Humanities specialist at: <https://alexander.mywconline.com/>