Creating a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is a one or two-sentence summary of the central analysis or argument of an essay. While the traditional location for a thesis is the last sentence of the first paragraph of an essay, locating the thesis anywhere in the first paragraph where it can be effectively understood by the reader is acceptable in most cases. Check with your professor about his or her particular preferences.

While some general principles can be offered for writing a thesis statement, the structure of the thesis statement depends on the type of essay you are writing. This handout will describe common characteristics of thesis statements and offer examples of both effective and ineffective statements for various kinds of papers.

**Common Characteristics of Thesis Statements**

- The thesis statement offers a central idea that the paper will then support through appropriate evidence and analysis.

- An effective thesis statement is not just a statement of fact or a description of a topic. A good thesis statement describes for the reader what your particular position is on an issue, or your interpretation of the significance of a particular idea.

  **Example of a topic description:** The rise of consumerism in America is well-documented in the 21st century. [This sentence merely describes a fact about consumerism, but does not offer an analysis of or opinion about its causes.]

  **Example of a thesis statement about a topic:** The almost constant exposure of the average American to advertising on the Internet and television has given rise to an increased level of consumerism in the 21st century. [This statement offers a particular argument about WHY consumerism has increased during a particular time period.]

- Avoid a common mistake that students make when trying to construct a thesis statement by eliminating phrases like “In this paper I will explore/argue” etc. While use of the first person is often acceptable when constructing a thesis statement (check with your professor for disciplinary conventions), it is often more effective to simply state the argument or points of analysis directly, without the first person.

- Because thesis statements are included in the introductory paragraph of an essay, necessary background on the issue and its controversies should also be included in this paragraph as a way of setting up the topic which the thesis statement explores.

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-Most writers begin with a tentative or “working” thesis statement to guide their research and writing process. However, as you develop your draft, you are likely to discover new information and come to a better understanding of your assignment. This process should naturally lead you to refine your thesis statement so that it corresponds more closely with the content you develop for your essay.

**Genres and Types of Thesis Statements**

To determine what kind of thesis statement you are writing, consider the genre of your assignment. “Genre” simply means “type.” The most common genres or types of academic essays are argumentative, analytical, expository, or narrative. Each genre requires a slightly different kind of thesis statement.

**Argumentative Essays:** An argumentative essay requires that you make a particular claim about an issue and support that claim with evidence. Claims can take a variety of forms, such as an opinion, a proposal, an evaluation, a speculation on a cause and effect relationship, or an interpretation of events. The claim you are making is the basis of your thesis statement, which should offer a reason for your particular opinion or interpretation.

**Example of an argumentative thesis:** *High schools should include the fine arts in their curriculum to stimulate students’ cognitive development, allow them an outlet for creative expression, and improve their appreciation of artistic creations of various types.*

**Discussion:** Based on this thesis statement, the reader would expect the paper to explore how the arts stimulate cognitive development, allow for creative expression, and improve artistic appreciation for high school students.

**Analytical Essays:** An analytical essay explores particular characteristics of an issue or phenomenon, and offers your interpretation or evaluation of how these elements work together or why they are important.

**Example of an analytical thesis:** *McDonald’s advertising campaign for children reveals serious issues regarding the misrepresentation of the nutritional content of McDonald’s Happy Meals.*

**Discussion:** The reader would expect this essay to analyze McDonald’s advertising campaign for children and to describe the ways in which these campaigns misrepresent nutritional content of Happy Meals.

**Expository Essays:** Expository essays seek to describe an idea or issue for the reader. The thesis for this type of essay will define the boundaries of the topic for the reader, usually by identifying specific qualities or categories that will be explored in the essay.
Example of expository thesis: *The typical college student of the twenty-first century utilizes technology in a variety of ways, to complete academic assignments, to interact socially with peers and family, and to access information.*

Discussion: An expository essay utilizing this thesis statement would describe how technology is used with the different components mentioned: academics, social interaction, and information access.

**Narrative Essays:** A narrative essay tells a story and is a common genre for the personal essay. While a narrative essay will certainly have a central focus, it is not always effective to create an explicit thesis statement; sometimes an implied thesis will work better for this particular style. However, at times narrative essays can benefit from a specific thesis statement. This is a stylistic choice that will depend on the essay you create; alternatively, your professor may specifically request a thesis statement for your narrative essay.

Example of narrative thesis: *My positive experiences with reading and writing throughout my childhood led to an intense interest in literary pursuits throughout my lifetime.*

Discussion: The narrative essay associated with this thesis statement would give examples of reading and writing experiences from childhood, as well as the literary pursuits that the writer engaged in throughout her life.