

Thesis Statement Basics

- **What is the purpose of a thesis statement?**

A thesis statement informs the readers of the content, the argument, and often the direction of a paper.

- **What is a thesis statement? What is not?**

A thesis statement is a declarative sentence.

1. Thesis statements are **not titles or fragments.**

Title: My First Smoking Experience

Thesis: Although all my friends thought cigarettes were stylish, I discovered that smoking is actually a disgusting habit with many health risks.

Fragment: That we should become more aware of our environment.

Thesis: We should become more aware of our environment so that we can preserve our wilderness, protect wildlife, and conserve our rapidly disappearing resources.

2. Thesis statements are **not questions.**

Question: Why are biofeedback techniques excellent methods of stress reduction?

Thesis: Because of its simplicity, accuracy, and lack of toxicity, biofeedback is often a successful technique for migraine relief.

3. Thesis statements are **not commands.**

Command: Note the differences between cooks and chefs.

Thesis: Although meals prepared by either cooks or chefs can be equally delicious, chefs differ from cooks in education, professional commitment, and artistry.

A thesis statement is an arguable idea.

1. Thesis statements are **not facts**.

Fact: Cortez conquered Mexico in 1509.

Thesis: The colonial mentality which prompted Cortez's barbaric invasion of Mexico brought about not an advance of native society but a destruction of Aztec culture.

Fact: When I was six, my parents took me on a trip to Alaska where I experienced my first tragedy.

Thesis: Witnessing the death of my brother in an Alaskan avalanche last winter horrified me at the time but in retrospect taught me to appreciate that small things in life, to value my relationships, and to trust in God.

2. Thesis statements are **not announcements** of the author's purpose or assignment.

Announcement: This essay will explain my reasons for supporting capital punishment for first-degree murders.

Thesis: First-degree murders should receive capital punishment because there are too many repeat offenders, because rehabilitation programs have proved ineffective, and because murder is too heinous a crime to be punished by anything less than death.

3. Thesis statements are **not obvious**.

Obvious: Litter creates pollution of the environment.

Thesis: Recycling programs, though expensive at first, are ultimately an efficient, cost effective, and environmentally sound means of reducing waste in our environment.

4. Thesis statements are **not unarguable personal opinions**.

Opinion: My favorite color is green.

Thesis: Colors do more than indicate personal preference: they reveal emotions, indicate purpose, act symbolically, and influence subconscious thoughts.

A thesis statement is specific and narrowed.

1. Thesis statements **are not broad overgeneralizations**.

Broad: All feminists are militant.

Narrow: Gloria Steinem has helped positively change society's perspective on women's roles at home and in the workplace.

2. Thesis statements **cover only one topic**.

Many topics: Marijuana should not be legalized and the legal age for drinking alcohol should not be lowered because they negatively influence young children.

One topic: Medicinal marijuana use should not be legalized because it creates problems for peace officers, physicians, and parents.

3. Thesis statements often **focus the essay and guide its direction**.

Unfocused: Martin Luther King, Jr. is a role model for everyone to follow.

Focused: Because of his determination, his courage to follow his beliefs, and his unwavering sense of justice, Martin Luther King, Jr. is a symbol of American freedom.

Unfocused: Amy Tan's The Joy Lot Club is a candid portrayal of Chinese American mother-daughter relationships.

Focused: In The Joy Lot Club, Amy Tan skillfully illustrates how cultural, generational, and internal conflicts between Chinese American mothers and daughters all add to the difficulty and character of the immigrant experience.

Thesis statements are worthy of development in an academic paper and interest an adult audience.

1. Thesis statements are **not simplistic**.

Simplistic: Cats and dogs look different and act differently.

More interesting: Though seemingly adorable and tame, mountain lions are actually wild, dangerous predators.

2. Thesis statements are **not immature or tasteless**.

Tasteless: Passing gas in an elevator was an extremely embarrassing moment for me because I learned that I had a problem and that others are more observant than I had thought.

Suitable: Though the product of slick advertising, psyllium does not effectively deal with flatulence, diverticulosis, or colon cancer. (This topic is now more academic).

***Note:** Always check with your instructor if you are unsure about the suitability of your thesis for your audience.*

Thesis statements are concise.

Wordy: Censorship should be banned by everyone in all circumstances and all states in the nation because it destroys the rights of free speech guaranteed to us by the Constitution of the United States since the Constitution was written by John Hancock and all the other statesmen.

Concise: Censorship should be banned in the United States because it destroys the constitutionally guaranteed right of speech.

The most common, and often required, spot for a thesis statement is at the end of the introductory paragraph.