



How Do I Write a Thesis Statement?

Writing is a deliberate act; one has to make up one's mind to do it.

—JAMES BRITTON

What do you want to discover through your research? In what order will you present your ideas? An effective *thesis statement* is designed to answer these questions. That's why once you have narrowed your topic, it's time to turn your attention to your *thesis statement*. A thesis statement is the central point you are arguing in your research paper.

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Here are the five basic requirements for a thesis statement:

1. It states the *topic* of the research paper, the main idea.
2. It shows the *purpose* of your essay; in this case, to persuade your readers that your point is valid and deserves serious consideration.
3. It shows the *direction* in which your argument will proceed. A good thesis statement implies (or states) the order in which your ideas will be presented.
4. It is written in focused, *specific language*.
5. It is interesting, showing a clear voice and style.

Since your thesis statement is the backbone of your paper, it's crucial to spend the time to craft exactly the thesis statement you want and need. Here's how to do that.

List Topics

What do you want to know about your subject? What questions do you want answered? Start by listing topics and possible subtopics.

Don't be afraid to make your list long, since your purpose at this point is to see how many subtopics you can generate. In addition, you don't know how much information you can get on each of these subtopics. As a result, your list will likely include specific details as well as broad topics.

Here's how one writer started writing a thesis statement for a research paper on the women's movement.

Topic	Contemporary women and work
Possible subtopics	High-quality education Appropriate training Pay gap between men and women Enormous progress in workforce Economic necessity for work Women and the "second shift" Women's traditional roles Women taking "men's jobs" Personal satisfaction from work Fight against discrimination The "glass ceiling" Personal ambition Restricted jobs/"women's work" "Pink-collar jobs" "White-collar jobs" "Blue-collar jobs" Sexual harassment on the job Sexual stereotypes about women Issue of child care Women's movement

By developing and refining your list of subtopics while you're forming your thesis statement, you won't lose time doubling back. But keep in mind that this is a first step—nothing that you write is set in stone.

Having trouble? There are a number of computer software programs available that can help you with this step in your research paper. You may wish to try one and see if it suits your needs.

Draft a Thesis Statement

After you have narrowed your topic and drafted a list of ideas, you're ready to write a preliminary thesis statement. How can you turn this list of subtopics into a thesis statement? Follow these guidelines:

1. Sort the ideas into categories.
2. Select the categories that you want to use.
3. Formulate your thesis around these categories.
4. Write your thesis as a declarative sentence, not a question.
5. Be open to revision.

Follow this pattern: (I expect to prove that) Make an assertion about your topic.

Example

Here's how one writer did it:

Topic	Contemporary women and work
Training	High-quality education Appropriate training
Discrimination	The "glass ceiling" Pay gap between men and women "Pink-collar jobs" "White-collar jobs" "Blue-collar jobs" Women taking "men's jobs" Restricted jobs/"women's work" Sexual harassment on the job

Reasons women work

Personal satisfaction
Economic necessity
Ambition

Pressures

Women and the “second shift”
Women’s traditional roles
Sexual stereotypes about women
Issue of child care

Possible Thesis Statements:

- Women won’t achieve true equality in the workforce until outmoded sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual harassment, and internal and external pressures are eliminated.
- We’ve come a long way, baby, but women still face significant pressure and discrimination in the workforce.
- With quality education and training, female workers can overcome the discrimination and pressure they face in many jobs.
- Despite pressure and discrimination, women have made great strides in the workforce.
- The women’s movement has been instrumental in eliminating much of the discrimination and harassment women face on the job.

Let’s look at the first possible thesis statement developed with its main ideas:

Example

Women won’t achieve true equality in the workforce until outmoded sexual stereotypes, discrimination, sexual harassment, and internal and external pressures are eliminated.

Thesis: Women have yet to achieve equality in the workforce.

Main points in order:

1. Discrimination must be eliminated.
2. Outmoded sexual stereotypes must be eliminated.
3. Sexual harassment must be eliminated.
4. Internal as well as external pressures must be eliminated.

Research may lead you to revise your thesis, even disprove it, but stating it upfront will point you in the direction of your investigation.

Sample Thesis Statements

Many writers use models to help them shape and evaluate their work. Here are some sample thesis statements that you can use as models for a paper of between 7 and 10 pages. Compare these statements to the one you are writing:

Examples

Too General

Bilingual education isn’t effective

Too Narrow

Bilingual education helps students maintain their native language

Too General

Rainforests are irreplaceable

Too General

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is a great short story

Too Narrow

“Mothers Against Drunk Driving” is an excellent program

Too Narrow

A flat tax helps tax accountants

Too General

The cafeteria isn’t very good

On Target

Bilingual education should be eliminated because it limits students’ success, burdens students unfairly, and isn’t cost-effective.

On Target

Bilingual education should be continued because it preserves a students’ heritage as well as their native language.

On Target

Rain forests must be preserved because they offer people many resources we cannot replace.

On Target

The wallpaper in “The Yellow Wallpaper” symbolizes the narrator’s suffocating life.

On Target

Some programs designed to eliminate drunk driving have been effective, but far more efforts are needed, especially concerning teenager drunk driving.

On Target

A flat tax would benefit the government, business, and consumers.

On Target

The cafeteria could attract more business if it improved the quality of its food, its appearance, and the attitude of the staff.

Check Your Work

Use this checklist to evaluate your thesis statement:

- _____ 1. The thesis statement clearly states the main idea of my research paper.
- _____ 2. The thesis statement indicates that I am writing a persuasive essay.
- _____ 3. If the thesis statement is in response to an assignment, it fulfills the requirements and meets the parameters.
- _____ 4. The thesis statement is the appropriate scope for the assignment, neither too broad nor too general.
- _____ 5. From the thesis statement, readers can see the order in which my ideas will be presented.
- _____ 6. The thesis statement uses specific language rather than vague, general terms.
- _____ 7. The thesis statement is interesting, lively, intriguing; it makes my audience want to read the entire paper.
- _____ 8. The thesis statement shows evidence of original thought and effort. The topic is fresh and worth my effort to write.