



NO. 25 IN THE WRITING CENTER HANDOUT SERIES

What is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement is the sentence (or two) stating the essay's argument. It provides a foundation for smaller arguments and guides the reader through the essay. Usually located near the end of the introduction, a thesis narrows your general topic to a specific, focused argument which is supported by the evidence presented in the rest of your paper. A good thesis should answer the question, "What does this paper prove?"

Thesis vs. Topic.

One of the most common mistakes students make is confusing the thesis with the topic. Here are some examples of each to help make the difference clear.

Topic: nature and sexuality in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Thesis: Hardy suggests the complexity of Tess as a woman and a character through several series of images, among which garden-related images predominate as the expression of her sexuality.

Topic: school vouchers

Thesis: The implementation of a tax-funded voucher system would significantly harm the public schools and would not achieve the desired outcome of overall educational improvement.

Topic: interpretation of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men"

Thesis: Eliot's replacement of the formal poetic restrictions of rhyme scheme and meter for the more natural sound of the speaking voice and the rhythm of the breath, along with his unconventional use of punctuation, express the fragmentation of values and the breakdown of coherent society in the aftermath of World War I.

Topic: democratic values in Karl Marx's writing

Thesis: Although many totalitarian regimes in history steeped themselves in Marxist ideology, a careful review of Marx's writing reveals a different understanding of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and provides an inherently democratic vision of socialism.

Identifying a Good Thesis

How can you evaluate the thesis of your paper? Here are a few important questions to ask yourself:

- **Does the thesis fit the scope of the assignment?** Don't try to prove something too broad or too specific for the length of your paper.
- **Can the thesis be argued against by reasonable people?** Trying to think of the opposing argument can strengthen your argument and test the importance of your thesis.
- **Does the thesis express one main idea that links together all of the supporting ideas in the paper?** You may have twenty important arguments in your paper, but your thesis should act as an umbrella, uniting the minor points under its shadow and showing how those ideas relate. Avoid simply listing your various points like a laundry list that merely points to each of your body paragraphs' topic sentences.

Remember, even a good thesis may not fit the paper as it is transformed through revisions. Spend a good portion of your revision time making sure your thesis works with what the paper says as a whole.

[For more information on this topic, see](#)

Academic Writing by Ilona Leki

Writing from A to Z, Sally Barr Ebst, ed.

Writing Analytically, David Rosenwasser & Jill Stephen, eds. Chapters 6-7

Writing Center Handout No. 26. "How To Write A Thesis Statement"