

# UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

## TIPS FOR WRITING AN EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENT

Thesis statements are essentially the driving force and backbone of an academic essay. Without a thesis statement, your essay will lack a cohesive argument and will read more like a list of statistics, quotations or connecting ideas. Before completing your thesis statement, ask yourself:

- Is your essay's major claim complex? Is it insightful? Is it surprising or unexpected?
- Does your thesis respond to a question, tension or problem?
- Is your thesis stated clearly at the outset and does it evolve and develop throughout the paper?
- Does your thesis statement have a clear motive?

Effective thesis statements directly and boldly articulate a complex, arguable or surprising argument (or arguments) of your own which will need to develop throughout the essay. They should be intelligent, well thought-out responses to a question or problem your essay will address.

### **Weak Thesis Statements Often:**

#### Make No Claim

- Example: *This paper will examine the similarities and differences between two articles.*
- Possible Solution: Put the articles in conversation with one another and raise specific issues they agree or disagree about.

#### Are Obviously True or Statements of Fact

- Example: *Tourists are often out of place in other cultures.*
- Possible Solution: Make an assertion your reader can argue with.

#### Restate Conventional Wisdom or Clichés

- Example: *We shouldn't judge others because it's the inside that counts.*
- Possible Solution: Seek to complicate your thesis by anticipating counterarguments; try offering something new to the cliché.

#### Offer Personal Conviction as the Basis for the Argument

- Example: *Clearly, Kincaid is being one-sided.*
- Possible Solution: Maintain some distance from your subject. Do not merely assume your idea is an objective or obvious truth.

#### Make Overly Broad Claims

- Example: *Limerick shows her knowledge about the West.*
- Possible Solution: Convert broad, generic categories into more specific, complex assertions. Find ways to bring out the complexity of your argument.

### More Questions for Constructing Strong Thesis Statements:

A strong thesis statement is often not created all at once but will rather go through stages of revision. A thesis statement in its early form is called a “working thesis.” While honing and tightening your working thesis, ask yourself these questions:

- Does my thesis pass the “So what?” test? If a reader’s first response is likely to be “So what?” then you need to clarify it or connect it to some larger issue via a compelling motive.
- Is my thesis statement specific enough? Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like “good” or “successful,” see if you could be more specific: why is something “good”; what specifically makes something “successful?”
- Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering? If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to fit together, one of them has to change. It’s perfectly okay to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary!
- Does my thesis answer the question? Re-reading the question prompt after constructing a working thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.
- Does my thesis statement teach my reader something they did not already know? Am I bringing a new idea or perspective to the table on the issue or problem raised? Am I happy with what my thesis statement is saying?

### Points to Remember:

- The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of a paper.
- A thesis is not the answer to a math problem; it is not supposed to be “correct.” Your thesis should be designed to persuade the reader that your point of view is valid and worthy of consideration.
- Make sure your thesis is your own argument and not simply the argument that you think your instructor or one of your sources would approve of.
- A thesis statement will never be perfect, because it is an attempt to encapsulate everything that will happen in your argument. Since it takes a whole paper to do that, your thesis will always lack something. Accept this and make it the best it can be regardless!

Credit: “Thesis Statements,” The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. 25 October 2017, <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/thesis-statements>; “Developing Strong Thesis Statements,” Purdue Online Writing Lab. 25 October 2017, <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/01/>

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