

THESIS STATEMENTS

1. What a Thesis Statement Does:

Useful both to the writer and to the reader, a thesis statement usually consists of one sentence which sets forth the main or controlling idea of an essay. In this statement, the author gives the paper a sense of purpose and makes clear the position to be taken or the point to be made.

A clearly stated thesis helps the writer avoid aimless meandering, while guiding the reader into the scope, structure and tone of the essay. From a well written thesis, the reader may easily discern how much ground the writer intends to cover and what the essay's primary method of organization is going to be.

Logical patterns of organization include the following: Narration, description, illustration, definition, division and classification, comparison and contrast, analysis (of causes and effects or of problems and solutions).

The essay may be organized spatially (where an event occurs); chronologically (when an event occurs); or logically (according to the purpose and focus of the essay). The thesis also projects the tone of the entire writing (informational, dispassionate, humorous, belligerent, satiric, critical).

2. How a Thesis Statement Strengthens Unity:

Each sentence, paragraph and section of the writing should address and support some portion of the thesis.

Any idea or sentence not directly related to the thesis should be deleted as extraneous or explained in terms of relevancy to the thesis.

An insufficient amount of supportive material for a particular thesis may require an expanding, rewording or reworking of that thesis statement.

How a Thesis Statement is Presented:

A thesis may be stated directly or implied (not stated directly, but obvious to the reader). For example, an essay portraying the Abraham Lincoln's diligence during his formative years may not state "Lincoln's formative years were characterized by diligence," but the concept will be obvious through the types of illustrations cited.

To test the focus and clarity of an implied thesis, both the author and reader should be able to state that implied thesis in one or two sentences. Both interpretations, although not exact in wording, should be similar in concept. Another way of stating the above thesis could be "Hard work marked Lincoln's early years."

3. What a Thesis Statement is NOT:

Recognizing what a thesis is NOT aids in formulating an effective and complete thesis statement: First, a thesis is not just a title ("The Challenge of Camping"). Neither is it merely the mention of the topic to be addressed (Camping). In addition, it is not the announcement of the subject ("I am going to write about my camping challenges"). Finally, a thesis statement is not a statement of absolute fact, for which no judgment or interpretation is necessary ("I went camping during the hottest week of the summer"). Rather, it is a complete sentence which expresses some idea, belief, opinion, reaction, or position which must be explained and supported. ("On my latest camping expedition, I encountered many unforeseen problems.")

4. Where a Thesis Statement is Located:

The thesis, if stated directly, may appear anywhere within the essay. Frequently, the thesis appears early, often within the first paragraph. Some writers thrust their reader into the thesis statement with the first sentence. Others ease the reader into the thesis by prefacing it with an introductory comment, anecdote, scenario, example or illustration. A controversial subject or one requiring extended explanation or exemplification may have its thesis placed at the end of the essay for easier acceptance and greater impact.

5. Why Use a Working Thesis Statement:

An author usually begins with a working or trial thesis which expands, decreases or changes, depending upon the amount and focus of supporting material. A working thesis consists of two parts: a topic and a comment about that topic. The "comment" is an inference, an assertion, a judgment, an opinion, an evaluation. The thesis statement "The current rise in school violence may be traced to three major causes" contains both a topic ("the rise of school violence") and a comment, an assertion ("may be traced to three major causes"). From this thesis, the reader expects the author to name three major causes and to support how each is a major contributor to school violence.

6. How a Thesis Statement Establishes Focus:

A good thesis is both restricted (manageable) and unified. The shorter the essay, the more specific (focused) the thesis statement needs to be. For example, a one to three page essay might analyze the use of contrast in one of Robert Frost's poems, but not in a large number of his poems.

For anything less than book length, the following thesis lacks unity and is unmanageable: "Detective stories are not a high form of literature, but people have always been fascinated by them, and many fine writers have experimented with them."

A more unified and focused thesis would be "Detective stories appeal to the basic human desire for thrills." An even more restricted thesis would be "That detective stories appeal to the basic human desire for thrills may be exemplified by the popular television series *Murder She Wrote*." Effective, this thesis statement appeals to reader interest and presents an idea which is specific, manageable, and supportable.