Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?

...a single sentence that formulates both your topic and your point of view. In a sense, the thesis statement is your answer to the central question or problem you have raised.

--The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

A thesis statement, sometimes called a problem statement, is a declarative statement (usually one but sometimes two or more sentences) that clarifies the specific topic, presents your opinion of (not merely facts about) the topic, and incorporates qualifications or limitations necessary to understand your views.

--The Pocket Guide to APA Style

Topic + Your Comment/Opinion on that topic = Thesis Statement

* A statement that expresses the topic of your paper and your comment on that topic (your point of view)
* A statement that identifies the purpose of your paper
* A promise to your readers letting them know what you will discuss
* A way to help focus your thinking, research, and writing throughout the drafting process
* A thesis statement is flexible

What a thesis statement is not:

* A statement of fact or observation (no matter how astute the observation)
* A statement of personal conviction or opinion
* A generalization or overly broad claim

Where should it be?

A thesis statement should be near the beginning of your paper. Typically, the thesis statement is at the last sentence of the introduction. However, it’s not required to be, especially if you need to provide context before making your claim/argument. In some instances the thesis statement might be a few paragraphs into the paper.

How to begin drafting a thesis statement:

* What interests you?

For appointments go to: www.usfsm.edu/infocommons/appointment.php. Call (941) 359-4323 for more information.
* What point do you want to make?
* What comment do you want to make?
* What are you trying to achieve in the paper?
* Who is your audience?
* What is the assignment asking? How can you answer that question AND focus on a small area of investigation?
* When is your assignment due? How much time to you have to research and write?

Testing your thesis:

* Are you just stating facts?
* Are you just stating the obvious?
* Is your thesis statement a claim rather than just a descriptive sentence?
* Can someone disagree with you? Is it debatable?

Some final questions:

* Does your thesis statement clearly state your position or the main idea of the paper?
* What is the main idea of your paper in 25 or fewer words?
* Does your thesis statement match what your paper is about? Have you supported the thesis or digressed? Where? How? (If so, revise your thesis statement or your paper.)
* Is your thesis statement something you can talk about, prove, or describe?

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Examples: (This section is borrowed from Writing Analytically, by Jill Stephen and David Rosenwasser.)

Weak thesis: This paper addresses the characteristics of a good corporate manager. *(This thesis does not make a claim/is a statement of fact, it does not answer a “how” or “why” question.)*

Stronger thesis: The very trait that makes for an effective corporate manager—the drive to succeed—can also make the leader domineering and, therefore, ineffective. *(Here, the thesis raises a specific issue for the essay to explore.)*

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Weak thesis: The jean industry targets its advertisements to appeal to young adults. *(Obviously true/statement of fact; does not answer a “how” or “why” question.)*

Stronger thesis: By inventing new terms, such as ‘loose fit,’ and ‘relaxed fit,’ the jean industry has attempted to normalize, even glorify, its products for an older and heavier generation. *(Here, readers can agree/disagree with this claim.)*

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Weak thesis: Sir Thomas More’s Utopia proposes an unworkable set of solutions to society’s problems because, like communist Russia, it suppresses individualism. (*This thesis argues on the basis of personal conviction or opinion and does not answer “how”*)

Stronger thesis: Sir Thomas More’s Utopia treats individualism as a serious but remarkable social problem. His radical treatment of what we might now call “socialization” attempts to redefine the meaning and origin of individual identity. (*This thesis replaces opinion with a theory to be tested by evidence.*)

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Weak thesis: Violent revolutions have both positive and negative results for man. (*This thesis makes an overly broad claim.*)

Stronger thesis: Although violent revolutions begin to redress long-standing social inequities, they often do so at the cost of long-term economic dysfunction and the suffering that attends it. (*Here, the thesis brings out complexity of subject and narrows focus.*)

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Works Cited*


*Work cited is formatted to fit page.*