

# Thesis Statements



## What does a successful thesis statement do?

Thesis statements go by many names depending on what kind of writing is being talked about. In scientific papers a hypothesis is a formalized version of thesis, outlining a suggested reason for *why* something is the way it is. In a persuasive or argumentative paper the thesis serves the same function: to give the reader a clear idea of how the author thinks something works. Creative writing, by its nature, does not *need* a thesis; however it is helpful to consider the concept “plot twist” that is based around suggesting one explanation of the story’s events, a thesis in a sense, and then having the ending work against that expectation which is a reversal of how it is used in non-creative texts. Most college writing assignments will expect that the essay is organized around a thesis statement, and for good reason as it is difficult to write a clear and well-organized argument without using a thesis statement.

## A solid thesis can help your writing by

- Making clear to readers what exactly your main argument is, and avoiding the reader being confused.
- Providing your reader with a clear interpretation of the evidence you present in your paper.
- Guiding your writing as well as the reader because you will need to present evidence and logical arguments to support your thesis statement.

## What are some useful strategies for writing a successful thesis statement?

A useful exercise when trying to make a thesis statement is this: If you had to explain to a friend, who isn’t in your class, what your paper is about in a single sentence, what would you say?

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## What are some common features of successful thesis statements?

A good thesis makes a debatable claim, something beyond a mere statement of fact, and then connects that claim to an explanation. Claims can range from issues of definition: "Good Writing is clear and focused," value: "Writing is an important skill," cause and effect: "Learning how to write a good thesis makes you a better writer," or even solutions to problems: "Teaching students about thesis statements will help them become better writers."

An example of both a claim and explanation would be "Superman is the most iconic superhero in the world, as he is the most internationally recognized." The claim being made is that the comic book character Superman is the *most* iconic, with the explanation being that this status is because of his exceptional international recognition. A statement like "Superman is a famous superhero" on the other hand, is not a thesis because it is just making a factual statement rather than a claim *and* it lacks any kind of explanation. If you look at the earlier examples of thesis statements, you should be able to identify both a claim and an explanation in each of them.

In academic papers it is important to keep your claims narrow and focused to a single topic, so that you keep your ideas clear and you avoid trying to "bite off too much" in terms of what you are writing about. Avoid general statements and claims that are merely factual; the goal is to provide an explanation to a complex issue that you are presenting. Just like a scientific hypothesis, you are attempting to explain a part of the world as you see it to your reader, even if you are discussing things that can't be measured.

## Examples of weak thesis statements

- Global Population has grown at an exponential rate, threatening resources across the world.  
(Weak because it lacks an explanation, and two are possible, either why has the population grown so quickly, or why that growth is a threat)
- Drug use is detrimental to society because it encourages laziness.  
(Weak because it is very broad topic, drug use encompasses a wide variety of very different activities, and by consequence the explanation has to be very simple in order to fit, making the explanation weak as well)

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### Final thoughts

- In another way, the thesis is also like the opening statements by lawyers in a court drama, both lawyers usually start with statements like “over the course of this trial, I will prove ...” Don’t be afraid to copy this move and explicitly tell your readers what your argument is in simple terms, after all clarity is a major goal for a thesis statement.
- You don’t need to prove your case with your thesis, which is for the evidence in the main part of your paper, instead focus on your explanation of cause-and-effect relating to your topic.
- Your thesis statement does *NOT* have to be in the last sentence of your first paragraph, although this is an appropriate spot for shorter papers. Your thesis statement should be near the end of your introduction, wherever that may be, and which for longer papers might not even be on the first page.