

Thesis Statement

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What is a Thesis?

Many writers agonize over this question, but the answer is deceptively simple. A thesis is one declarative statement informing readers what the writer plans to prove or discuss throughout the rest of the paper. What a writer wants to accomplish with his or her writing will determine the type of thesis.

Types of Theses

The primary types of thesis statements are informative and argumentative. An informative thesis is normally less complex than an argumentative thesis simply because it is not choosing a stance on the topic of the essay. Even though the informative thesis is neutral, it still needs to be specific in explaining the direct intention of the essay. An argumentative thesis, however, should be controversial in addition to being specific. In other words, a reader should be able to take an opposing position to the argumentative thesis. Below are examples of both types of primary theses.

Informative Thesis Statement: Scientists believe that global warming is an environmental concern.

Argumentative Thesis Statement: Despite the Kyoto Accord's flaws, its institution would greatly reduce the environmental problems associated with global warming.

Thesis Placement

As a general rule, writers place thesis statements towards the ends of introductions when the intended audience is an academic or formal one; however, an exception to this rule does exist. The mysterious and often difficult alternative is called the imbedded thesis. The imbedded thesis is obtained when writing escalates to the purpose of the paper and the thesis is consequently placed at the end of the paper.

Methods of Formulating a Thesis

1. Asking Questions

Writers often think that the thesis statement should be a question, but it is more accurate to say that the thesis is an answer to a question the writer has asked about the topic. Asking questions about a general topic usually assists writers in discovering what they want to say about the topic. For example, in the very broad topic of whether women in the military should be allowed in combat, it would be helpful to ask a few specific questions:

- ◆ For what reasons are women currently kept out of combat? How are these reasons justified?
- ◆ Do I agree with this policy? Why or why not?
- ◆ If I disagree, what needs to be done to change this policy?
- ◆ How does women's participation in combat connect with broader concepts in women's theory?

By answering these questions, it becomes easier to form a tentative thesis.

Tentative Thesis Statement: The United States Armed Forces should change their policy against women in combat in order to quash the misguided stereotypes of women's capabilities, which keep women from serving their country to the best of their abilities.

2. Understanding the Purpose of a Paper

When a writer sits down to write, it is crucial that she or he has a clear purpose in mind. This will be extremely useful in forming a thesis. It may help to recall that the paper is supposed to be a mechanism of persuasion on a specific subject, and the whole point is to express a view and get others to accept that particular view as correct. One way to form a thesis is to write down the purpose of the paper, and then rewrite it until it more closely resembles an argument. For example, the general topic is animal testing:

Purpose: To convince readers that cosmetics companies should not test their products on animals.

Tentative Thesis: Cosmetics companies should not test their products on animals because animal testing is cruel and unnecessary.

3. Finding a Thesis through Prewriting

It is not uncommon for writers to discover a brilliant thesis randomly hidden in a mess of prewriting or in a rough draft. Many times writers sit down to write a rough draft and suddenly discover their true thesis statement on page four. Writers should not be discouraged by this; it simply means that she or he needed a bit of a warm-up before their true purpose could find its way to the page. If this happens, it is time for the working thesis to move toward the front of the essay where it can better serve its purpose of directing the reader and organizing the writing.

More Thesis Statements

Topic: President Bush's proposals concerning welfare reform

Thesis Statement: President Bush's proposals concerning welfare reform fail to aid many children already living in poverty, potentially harm women and children, and do not emphasize the importance of a college education.

Topic: The placement of women into combat roles within the military

Thesis Statement: In the interest of fairness and of putting the best people in combat, women should be allowed to share the risks and the rewards of battle.

Topic: Risks associated with investing money in the stock market and 401k plans

Thesis Statement: When placing discretionary income into investment vehicles such as stocks and 401k plans, one must be aware that there is no guarantee of any substantial return, an investment may actually decrease in value, and the value of the investment is often subject to influential forces beyond anyone's control.

Topic: The Kyoto Protocol on global warming

Thesis Statement: President Bush's refusal to participate in the Kyoto Protocol denies the urgency of global warming as a critical international issue, isolates the U.S. from new developments in energy-efficient technology, and creates unequal expectations of each nation's role in addressing international problems.

Topic: Promotion of accepted gender roles in two literary works, The Coquette and "Self-Reliance"

Thesis Statement: Although The Coquette and "Self-Reliance" belong to different genres and were published almost fifty years apart, both Emerson and Foster promote the idea that women independent of familial ties are dangerous not only to themselves but also to society.