

# WRITING A THESIS STATEMENT: THE CENTRAL STEP IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The goal of this tutorial is to help you write a compelling and accurate thesis statement. Its approach is linear; it presents the writing process and the formulation of a thesis as a step-by-step process. However, it may be better for you to side-step this detailed outline-process to create an original, arguable thesis statement. That is fine! You may be an associative thinker, one who jumps from one idea to the next based on relationships in your mind to memory, experience, observations, and external knowledge. Regardless of your final approach, or combination of approaches, this resource provides some tools and thinking strategies to help you formulate a thesis. Happy thesis writing!

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## THE THESIS STATEMENT EXPLAINED

The writing assignment you're given in a specific course often governs whether a paper is persuasive or informative, who the audience is, what the purpose is for addressing that audience, the paper length, and what research is required. The thesis statement (often called a claim) is the expression of the central idea of the composition. It explains a paper's argument, focus, or purpose.

In the writing process, the thesis is the step that bridges the prewriting and drafting stages, as indicated in the [Writing Process Outline](#). You may wish to review the [outline](#) first, so you can understand better the central role that the thesis statement plays in the writing process.

However, while the outline may suggest a linear process—1, 2, 3, 4, and you're finished!—the steps in the writing process are recursive—backward or at least sideways—as you return to an earlier point in the writing journey to re-confirm and strengthen the step you are on. For more information, please visit the following Purdue Global Writing Center's resources: [From Topic to Research Question to Thesis](#) and [The Writing Process](#).

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## SAMPLE THESIS STATEMENTS

For most academic writing, a thesis statement is a one- or two-sentence statement that declares the central idea of the paper.

### Informative Thesis Statements

For informative papers, the thesis expresses the attitude the writer is taking toward a topic and often lists the three-to-five key points (major support) that will guide the members of the audience through



the paper as they are being informed. A thesis statement for an informative paper on the topic of childhood obesity might sound something like this:

- The parents of children with a genetic predisposition towards obesity can help their children avoid obesity by controlling the children's diet, providing regular exercise, and promoting an active lifestyle.

Notice that the audience is referred to in the thesis (parents of certain children), the topic and attitude toward that topic are clear (that parents can make a difference in this area of their children's lives), and the list of main points to be covered in the paper suggests a clear organizational strategy (specific-to-general). Topic sentences in the body paragraphs will refer clearly to the three areas of development: diet, exercise, and lifestyle.

### **Persuasive Thesis Statements**

For persuasive papers, the thesis statement asserts the position the writer is taking on the issue and often lists the subclaims (major support) that the writer will use to convince the audience to re-think, or change a position on the issue. A thesis (claim) for an argumentative paper on the topic of the juvenile justice system might sound something like this:

- Although many people believe that expelling students is the best way to eliminate bullying from high schools, to help reduce instances of bullying, high school administrators should institute a zero-tolerance policy for fighting, hold alternative dispute resolution classes as a regular part of the curriculum, and establish a teen court program.

Notice that the audience is referred to in the claim (those who support traditional punishment of students), the issue and position on the issue are clear (bullying can be prevented and diffused effectively), and the list of subclaims to be covered in the paper suggests a clear organizational strategy (chronological: short-term to long-term). Topic sentences in the body paragraphs will refer clearly to the three areas of development: policy change, dispute resolution classes, and teen court.

### **Analytical Thesis Statement**

A thesis for an analysis paper (literature, history, philosophy, and so on) of a particular author's work might sound something like this:

- By examining Martin Luther King's use of logos in "Letter from Birmingham Jail," specifically, examples of historical analogies to Old Testament Prophets, St. Paul and Jesus, and the American Revolution, we can better understand King's claims and why his "Letter" is considered a classic argument.

Notice that the audience is not referred to directly in the thesis: The assumption for such an analysis always is that the audience is an academic one familiar with the work being analyzed; the topic and attitude toward that topic are clear (King's letter is classic argument); and the list of main points to be covered in the paper suggests a clear organizational strategy (chronological time line). Topic sentences in the body paragraphs will refer clearly to the three areas of development: The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the American Revolution.



### Thesis as Central Unifier

The sample thesis statements reveal is the unifying or “bridging” role that thesis statements play in the writing process. Once a writer has chosen a topic, audience, and purpose, and then prewritten and refined information about them, he or she can feel comfortable in his or her knowledge of the material being discussed or argued. Only then can a thesis be formulated, with an eye toward informing or persuading an audience through a unified, well-developed, and organized paper.

### Thesis as Indicator of Major Structure

The thesis anticipates the major structures of the paper’s drafts, including the prospect of adding citable research. A well-written thesis also anticipates the global revision process so that the paper will probably not have to undergo major structural or content changes. The Prewriting stages of Discovery and Refining have produced a thesis that contains the seeds of a well-unified, developed, and organized final paper.

**Note:** Sometimes, during drafting and revision, thesis statements change, even if they have been effectively and logically created. Remember that writing helps us to clarify what we’re thinking. But what we write can change what we are thinking, too! Thesis statements, while exceptionally important, shouldn’t be adhered to if the focus of the writing — and your thinking — changes.

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## THE WRITING PROCESS OUTLINE

The Writing Process in Four Steps: Discover (Prewriting), Refine (Prewriting), Draft, and Revise.

### 1. Discover: Prewriting I

- a. Choose a Topic
- b. Choose an Audience and Purpose
- c. Prewrite: Write or type the answers to the following questions, using brainstorming, freewriting, or some other method for generating text that you are comfortable with; aim for several hundred words.
  - i. **Why do I care about this topic?**
  - ii. **What do I already know about this topic?**
  - iii. **What do I need to find out about this topic that I do not know?**
  - iv. **Perform common knowledge research: Paraphrase your findings.**
    1. General encyclopedia
    2. Textbook
    3. News stories

### 2. Refine: Prewriting II



- a. Shape and Adapt Prewriting: With Audience, Purpose, and Assignment parameters in mind.
  - b. Decide if a return to step one, Discover, is needed to gather more information.
  - c. Once enough information is gathered, begin to pair pieces of information together to form groups of related content that can be presented in some order (time, space, importance, or topical).
  - d. **Develop Thesis:** Write a single sentence that lists the three-five most important pieces of information an audience to be informed or persuaded would need to find the paper credible.
- 3. Draft: Use the thesis as a guide to write the body paragraphs of the essay.**
- a. Devote at least one paragraph to each major point listed in the thesis, two or more if necessary.
  - b. Write topic sentences at the beginning of each body paragraph that clearly refer to the thesis points and that indicate the order of development for each point; topic sentences and concluding sentences for each paragraph can help the audience transition between points.
- 4. Second Discovery Process Initiated, for Citable Research**
- a. Conduct research using books, periodicals, and other sources to find expert opinion to support your information and conclusions.
    - i. For argument papers, also find research that can be used for counterarguments/rebuttal for your position. Rebuttal can be placed immediately after a background paragraph or interspersed within your paragraphs supporting your thesis.
    - ii. Be sure to use in-text citations and APA reference citations for all sources.
  - b. Write the introduction: Begin by getting the audience's attention. Use a startling fact, statistic, or anecdote to draw the audience into the paper. An audience to be informed needs you to be a teacher. An audience that needs to be persuaded should find a confident but kind adversary in you.
  - c. Write a background paragraph (or two) immediately following the introduction, providing the history of the topic to bring the audience up to speed as needed.
  - d. Write a conclusion: **Begin with a reworded thesis** and return to the opening, attention-getting material from the introduction: How has this opening material been clarified in light of your discussion? Explain this to your audience.
- 5. Revise**
- a. Global revision



- i. Unity: Be sure that the audience and purpose are clear; thesis and reworded thesis are in place; and topic sentences are in place.
  - ii. Development: Be sure that assignment parameters for length, number of sources, and required sections (background, rebuttal, etc.) are in place.
  - iii. Organization: Be sure that introduction is followed by background, rebuttal (if argument paper), body paragraphs (in correct sequence), and conclusion.
- b. Local Revision: Correct grammar, punctuation, mechanics, spelling, and APA citations.

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## CHECKLIST FOR THESIS DEVELOPMENT

- Do I know if the paper's purpose is informative or persuasive?
- Do I know the paper's length?
- Will I have to do research for this paper?
- Have I presented my thesis or claim in one or two sentences?
- Does my thesis/claim appear at the end of the first paragraph (or second paragraph in a longer paper)?
- Does my thesis/claim have a list of 3-5 key points or subclaims?
- Are my thesis's key points or subclaims listed in some logical order?
- Does the body of my paper stay focused on the thesis's key points or subclaims?
- Do I reiterate my thesis or claim in the conclusion of the paper?

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