

How to write a thesis statement

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In composition and academic writing, a thesis statement (or controlling idea) is a sentence in an essay, report, research paper, or speech that identifies the main idea and/or central purpose of the text. In rhetoric, a claim is similar to a thesis. For students especially, crafting a thesis statement can be a challenge, but it's important to know how to write one because a thesis statement is the heart of any essay you write. Here are some tips and examples to follow. The thesis statement serves as the organizing principle of the text and appears in the introductory paragraph. It is not a mere statement of fact. Rather, it is an idea, a claim, or an interpretation, one that others may dispute. Your job as a writer is to persuade the reader—through the careful use of examples and thoughtful analysis—that your argument is a valid one. A thesis statement is, essentially, the idea that the rest of your paper will support. Perhaps it is an opinion that you have marshaled logical arguments in favor of. Perhaps it is a synthesis of ideas and research that you have distilled into one point, and the rest of your paper will unpack it and present factual examples to show how you arrived at this idea. The one thing a thesis statement should not be? An obvious or indisputable fact. If your thesis is simple and obvious, there is little for you to argue, since no one will need your assembled evidence to buy into your statement. Your thesis is the most important part of your writing. Before you begin, you'll need to follow these tips for developing a good thesis statement. Read and compare your sources to determine the main points of agreement and disagreement. Do your sources conflict with one another? Don't just summarize your sources; claim your position behind their motives. Develop your thesis. Good ideas are rarely fully formed. They need to be refined. By continually refining your thesis to make it more specific, you will be able to refine it as you research and draft your essay. Consider the other sides. Just like a game, there are two main sides. You'll be able to refine your thesis by considering the counterclaims and refuting them in your essay, or even acknowledging them in a clause in your thesis. An effective thesis should answer the reader question, "So what?" It should not be more than a sentence or two. Don't be vague, or your reader won't care. Specificity is also important. Rather than make a broad, blanket statement, try a complex sentence that includes a clause giving more context, acknowledging a contrast, or offering examples of the general points you're going to make. Incorrect: British indifference caused the American Revolution. Correct: By treating their U.S. colonies as little more than a source of revenue and limiting colonists' political rights, British indifference contributed to the start of the American Revolution. In the first version, the statement is very general. It offers an argument, but no idea of how the writer is going to get us there or what specific forms that "indifference" took. It's also rather simplistic, arguing that there was a singular cause of the American Revolution. The second version shows us a road map of what to expect in the essay: an argument that will use specific historical examples to prove how British indifference was important to (but not the sole cause of) the American Revolution. Specificity and scope are crucial to forming a strong thesis statement, which in turn helps you write a stronger paper! Although you do want to grab your reader's attention, asking a question is not the same as making a thesis statement. Your job is to persuade by presenting a clear, concise concept that explains both how and why. Incorrect: Have you ever wondered why Thomas Edison gets all the credit for the light bulb? Correct: His savvy self-promotion and ruthless business tactics cemented Thomas Edison's legacy, not the invention of the lightbulb itself. Asking a question is not a total no-go, but it doesn't belong in the thesis statement. Remember, in most formal essay, a thesis statement will be the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. You might use a question as the attention-grabbing first or second sentence instead. Although you are trying to prove a point, you are not trying to force your will on the reader. Incorrect: The stock market crash of 1929 wiped out many small investors who were financially inept and deserved to lose their money. Correct: While a number of economic factors caused the stock market crash of 1929, the losses were made worse by uninformed first-time investors who made poor financial decisions. It's really an extension of correct academic writing voice. While you might informally argue that some of the investors of the 1920s "deserved" to lose their money, that's not the kind of argument that belongs in formal essay writing. Instead, a well-written essay will make a similar point, but focus more on cause and effect, rather than impolite or blunt emotions.

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