

Tips for Writing Your Thesis Statement

(Adapted from the Purdue OWL)

1. Determine what kind of essay you are writing:

An **expository** (or informative) essay explains, or ‘exposes’ something to readers. Your thesis for this sort of essay answers the question:

“What does my reader need to know, and why do they need to know it?”

An **argumentative** essay makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. The claim (or thesis) could be:

- a policy proposal (“there oughta be a law...”),
- A change of behavior (“do this instead of that”)
- an evaluation (“x is better/more important/more valuable than y”),
- a cause-and-effect statement (if we do X, then Y will be the consequence) ,
- Or a challenge of assumptions (“conventional wisdom says....., but a closer look at the evidence actually shows.....”)

The goal of the argumentative essay is to convince the reader that your claim is true based on the evidence provided.

An **analytical** essay breaks down an issue, an event, a complex thing, or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or idea, and presents this breakdown and evaluation to the reader.

2. Your thesis statement should be *specific*—it should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence. The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the first paragraph of an essay.

*“The purpose of a writing class is to develop **a meaningful thesis**, direct or implied, that will generate **a compelling essay**. Most importantly, a meaningful thesis will have a strong emotional connection between you and the material. In fact, **if you don’t have a “fire in your belly” to write the paper, your essay will be nothing more than a limp document, a perfunctory exercise in futility**. A successful thesis will also be **intellectually challenging** and afford a complexity **worthy of college-level writing**. Thirdly, the successful thesis will be demonstrable, which means it can be **supported by examples** and illustrations in a **recognizable organizational design**”.* (Adapted from: Jeff McMahon. https://herculodge.typepad.com/breakthrough_writer/thesis/)

Thesis categories:

Policy/Behavior change: “Congress needs to pass legislation that regulates access to social media for children.”

Value/Importance: “Face-to-face social interaction is more meaningful than “likes” on Instagram.”

Challenge Assumptions: “Contrary to conventional wisdom, social media does not encourage social interaction, it actually inhibits it.”

Reveal Cause/Effect: “(Over)-use of social media causes depression and anxiety in teenagers.”

(Some) Thesis do's and don'ts

(Adapted from: "Thesis Do's and Don'ts" June 2007. https://herculodge.typepad.com/breakthrough_writer/2007/06/thesis_dos_and_.html)

Don't...

1. ...write an easy thesis that is so self-evident or obvious that to support it will bore your reader.
2. ...write a thesis that is so broad and general that the only way to support it is with a 500-page book.
3. ...write a thesis that you don't understand or believe in because your lack of conviction will give your paper a limp, soggy quality that will depress both you and your reader.
4. ...write a thesis that "sounds good" but in truth bores the hell out of you so that when you sit down to write your essay you cry and curse your decision to enroll in a composition class.

Do...

1. ...write a thesis that has a strong emotional connection to you and your audience.
2. ...make your thesis relevant to current events and make that relevance apparent.
3. ...answer a *compelling question* you and your readers want answered.
4. ...write a thesis in a single sentence, followed by mapping components that support your argument.
5. ...write a thesis that is *crystal clear* in your mind— since you can only write a powerful, clear essay if the thoughts inside your head are clear and powerful.