

Thesis Statement Workshop

What does a thesis statement do?

1. Introduces a single topic
2. Articulates the writer's central idea/ argument in the essay, and may do one of the following:
 - a. Answer a question
 - b. Resolve a problem
 - c. Take a stance within a debate
3. Expresses the writer's attitude towards the topic (if necessary)

Where do I put my thesis statement?

1. Within the basic structure of the essay (intro, body, conclusion), the thesis statement is usually located within the introduction, after sentences introducing the text/ topic/ question/ debate.

What makes a strong thesis statement?

1. Specificity
 - a. Your thesis statement should address a specific topic and propose a specific argument within it.
 - b. When approaching your topic and drafting your thesis statement, consider the length of your assignment. Ask yourself, "Is my topic too broad for this essay? Will I struggle to discuss each point in full?" Also ask, "Is my topic too specific for this essay? Will I run out of things to say?"
 - c. Your thesis statement should use concrete, unambiguous language.
2. Evidence
 - a. You need to be able to support your thesis statement throughout the rest of your essay.
 - b. Your evidence should determine your thesis, rather than the other way around. You should craft your argument from the evidence you have, rather than first drafting your thesis statement and then only using evidence that supports it.
 - c. Your thesis isn't set in stone! While you should have a working thesis during the course of your project, sometimes the best time to actually write your final thesis statement is at the end of your writing process, after you've presented your evidence and your analysis of it. If at any point in your project your evidence changes your line of thinking, revise the thesis to reflect the evidence, rather than editing the evidence to match your thesis.
3. It is not a statement of the obvious or of established facts
 - a. Your thesis should present an original argument that you are making based on your analysis of the "facts" in the text.
4. It gives the reader a reason to keep reading and offers responses to questions like "So what?"

Where do I support my thesis?

1. In the body of the essay. Each body paragraph has a topic sentence that supports the thesis, and the paragraph expands on that one point and gives evidence to support it.

Practice 1: Find the Thesis Statement

Here, you have an introductory paragraph to an essay. In the next five minutes, read through the paragraph and locate the thesis statement.

Stephen King, creator of such stories as *Carrie* and *Pet Sematary*, stated that the Edgar Allan Poe stories he read as a child gave him the inspiration and instruction he needed to become the writer that he is. Poe, as does Stephen King, fills the reader's imagination with the images that he wishes the reader to see, hear, and feel. His use of vivid, concrete visual imagery to present both static and dynamic settings and to describe people is part of his technique. Poe's short story "The Tell-Tale Heart" is a story about a young man who kills an old man who cares for him, dismembers the corpse, then goes mad when he thinks he hears the old man's heart beating beneath the floor boards under his feet as he sits and discusses the old man's absence with the police. In "The Tell-Tale Heart," a careful reader can observe Poe's skillful manipulation of the senses.¹

What is the thesis statement? How do you know? How does the writer introduce the thesis statement? How could this thesis statement improve?

Practice 2: Improve the Thesis Statement

All of the following thesis statements could use improvement. With a partner, read over your assigned thesis statement and come up with suggestions to strengthen it in the next 2-3 minutes. Feel free to speak in generalities, using the information from the handout to inform your analysis.

1. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* explores issues of masculinity as well as femininity.
2. Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* is an example of non-linear storytelling.
3. In *Rebel without a Cause*, Jim Stark, the main character, is often seen literally on the edge of physical danger – walking too close to a swimming pool, leaning over an observation deck, and driving his car toward a cliff.²
4. Moments of silence, deferral, and digression in the first half of Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* contribute to the overall atmosphere of confusion in the poem.
5. Current protests by NFL players and discussions concerning them are part of a long history of conflation of sports and politics in the United States.
6. Hilary Mantel's novel *Eight Months on Gazzah Street* uses different narrative voices and the occasional elision of speech to create a sense of fear and paranoia.

For more on thesis statements (how to craft them, strategies to improve them, etc.) see further *The Bedford Handbook: Eighth Edition* sections 1c and 1e.

¹ Harry Livermore, "A Sample Paper," *The Five Paragraph Essay*, http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/five_par.htm.

² "Draft a working thesis," In *The Bedford Handbook: Eighth Edition*, ed. Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010) section 1c, page 20.