

Generating Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?

Every paper you write should have a main point or a main idea. The sentence that identifies that main point or main idea is the **thesis statement**.

How long does a thesis statement need to be?

A thesis statement focuses your ideas into one or two sentences.

Why do I need a thesis statement?

A thesis statement benefits a paper in two ways:

- It lets your reader know what to expect
- It helps you (the writer) keep the paper on track

A thesis statement should be

- ✓ **Clear** - your reader needs to be able to understand the point you are making or the idea you are trying to convey. Often, a muddled thesis means that we have not yet clarified our own thinking about our topic. Sometimes we need to write for a while in order to clarify our thinking.
- ✓ **Concise** – your paper needs to make a concise point or focus on one idea (or two or three closely-related ideas). You don't want to stray from your point or your focus.
- ✓ **Specific** – stating specific ideas helps both your readers and you (the writer) to know just what you want your paper to say
- ✓ **Original** – no one wants to read something that is so obvious or commonly known that you have nothing new to say about it.

What type of paper am I writing?

Your thesis statement is directly connected to the type of paper you are writing.

- An **analytical** paper breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or idea, and presents this breakdown and evaluation to the audience.
- An **expository** (explanatory) paper explains something to the audience.
- An **argumentative** paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence. The **claim** could be an opinion, a policy proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation. The goal of the argumentative paper is to convince the audience that the claim is true based on the evidence provided. (Source: Purdue OWL)

Tips for Writing Strong Thesis Statements

- A thesis statement should do more than simply announce your topic. Instead, the thesis statement should reflect your specific angle on the topic.

Weak thesis:

Leaves us with questions:
Relationship?
What sort?

Stronger thesis:

Indicates some type of psychological relationship.

Even stronger thesis:

Names specifics about the psychological relationship.

- **Weak thesis:** In this paper, I will discuss the relationship between fairy tales and early childhood.
- **Stronger thesis:** Fairy tales reveal a number of important aspects of the psychology of young children.
- **Even stronger thesis:** Fairy tales reveal a number of important aspects of the psychology of young children, including attachment to the mother, fear of abandonment, and competition for attention between siblings.

Type of Paper:

Analytical:

This **even stronger thesis** sets up a paper that will break down the psychology of childhood and fairy tales, and evaluate or explain each one.

- A thesis statement should avoid making generalizations that oversimplify complex issues.

Weak thesis:

Leaves questions:
What is it? How do we stop it?
Why should we?

Stronger thesis:

Says more about a cause and a way to stop it.

Even stronger thesis:

Focuses on one cause and three specific solutions.

- **Weak thesis:** Global warming is very real and must be stopped.
- **Stronger thesis:** Because global warming is caused by carbon emissions, we must work to reduce the level of emissions that our society puts into the earth's atmosphere.
- **Even stronger thesis:** If we want to alleviate global warming, then we have to examine the ways in which modern agriculture contributes to global warming through soil tilling practices, use of chemical fertilizers, and long-distance shipping.

Type of Paper: Argumentative:

This **even stronger thesis** sets up a paper that will argue in favor of specific solutions to the problem of global warming. The thesis statement indicates that the paper will interpret the problem of global warming (by focusing on one of its causes – agricultural practices) and will argue for specific solutions.

➤ A thesis statement can be too general in another way

- **Weak thesis:** Horror movies are a popular genre in modern film, but there are serious objections to today's horror movies.
- **Stronger thesis:** Horror movies desensitize the audience to violence.
- **Even stronger thesis:** Because modern special effects create realistic experiences for viewers, today's horror movies desensitize the audience to violence.

Weak thesis:

Makes a point, but the point is too general. What objections?

Stronger thesis:

Focuses on one problem with (or objection to) horror movies.

Even stronger thesis:

Concisely states one specific problem associated with horror movies.

Type of Paper: Argumentative and Analytical:

This **even stronger thesis** sets up a paper that will **argue** that horror movies are problematic and will **analyze** the way in which horror movies desensitize the audience.

➤ A thesis statement does more than just report a fact. Even if you are writing an expository paper, where your purpose is to explain something to an audience, your thesis needs to do more than simply state a fact or two.

- **Weak thesis:** An emergency protection order is an order from the court that allows the child to be removed from home if the child is in imminent danger, and grants parental responsibility to the local authority.
- **Stronger thesis:** Before the court will grant an emergency protection order, it must be satisfied that there are strong reasons to grant the order.
- **Even stronger thesis:** Before the court will grant an emergency protection order, it must be satisfied that there are strong reasons to grant the order, such as allegations of sexual abuse, allegations of substance abuse, and/or abandonment of the child.

Weak thesis:

Simply states a fact without giving any idea of how the paper will address the fact.

Stronger thesis:

Makes note that the court needs reasons to act.

Even stronger thesis:

Names some of those reasons.

Type of Paper: Expository:

This **even stronger thesis** sets up a paper that will explain something to the audience: some reasons why the court might grant an emergency protection order for a child.

- Thesis statements (especially for argumentative papers) often make judgment calls or state opinions. In such a case, your thesis statement should be specific and should justify your reasoning.

Weak thesis:

Simply states an opinion without giving any idea of how the paper will address the opinion.

Stronger thesis:

Identifies a cause-and-effect relationship that will become the basis for the argument.

Even stronger thesis:

Provides more concise statements about the cause-and-effect relationship, and then states an opinion based on that cause-and-effect relationship.

- **Weak thesis:** Music programs are essential for every public school.
- **Stronger thesis:** Music programs are an essential part of every education system because they offer many benefits to the student.
- **Even stronger thesis:** Studies show that students who take music classes score higher on standardized tests because those students are better at concentration-based tasks and have better basic memory recall. Therefore, music education should be a part of every public school system.

Type of Paper: Argumentative:

This **even stronger thesis** sets up a paper that will argue in favor of music programs in schools. Note that the thesis statement identifies a cause-and-effect relationship between music classes and higher scores on standardized tests.